Saijaku Muhai no Bahamut Volume 2

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最弱無敗の神装機竜（バハムート）2

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最弱無敗の神装機竜（バハムート）2

「あなたには私の恋人になって欲しいの。それが、私の依頼よ」

機竜使い（ドラグナイト）の王立士官学園（アカデミー）に、唯一の男子生徒として入学した、亡国の王子・ルクスは、とある一件により、ユミル教国からの留学生・クルルシファーの「恋人」になることに!?

遺跡調査の任務が出される一方で、神装機竜《アジ・ダハーカ》を駆る四大貴族の実力者・バルゼリッドが、クルルシファーの前に婚約者として現れ、波乱が幕を開ける。

お祭り騒ぎから始まった二人の契約と、動き出す世界。

謎を秘めた遺跡と少女を巡り、ルクスは『王国の覇者』と対峙する！

王道と覇道が交錯する、〝最強〟の学園ファンタジーバトル第2弾！

最弱無敗の神装機竜

バハムート

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UNDEFEATED
BAHAMUT
CHRONICLE

Prologue – Lux Contest

Part 1

"Haa…Haa…!"

Lux was running in the school building on a bright day after school.

As if being chased by an invisible predator.

Or, he was running gasping for breath as if running down an endless steep slope.

Now everyone else was the enemy.

In an overwhelmingly disadvantageous situation, Lux kept running.

He ran out of the Principal's room, passed through the familiar corridor and went up the stairs.

Isn't there any good hiding place somewhere?

Though he thought so in the corner of his head, he immediately realized that there was no place where he could feel at ease.

Therefore, Lux could not help but keep running.

“Phew… I somehow manage to get away for the time being, I guess—”

The corridor of the school building's third floor where the neatly tended green courtyard could be seen from the window.

When there was finally no one around, Lux heaved a sigh of relief and stopped.

At that moment,

“Oh! Found you!”

The female students who appeared from the corner of the corridor shouted as they saw Lux.

“Over here! Everyone, come help catch him!”

“Wait!? It’ll be bad if you call even the third years! Otherwise, they’ll monopolize him!”

Immediately after, several female students appeared one after another before him.

"Wai…!?"

What's more, their hands were holding various tools.

Staffs for self-defense and ropes for arrest.

Furthermore, they had prepared up (instead of up maybe change it to even) to a huge catching net, handcuffs and a collar.

(What the hell do they intend to do to me after catching me…!?)

He could not help but think so.

"Fufufu. We finally cornered you. Just let us catch you without resisting."

"Right, right. You're usually monopolized by the Princess and company after all. You should occasionally become our toy… not that. You have to do decent odd jobs—"

"You, you're drooling…?"

To the mutter of the girl who held the collar, the girl beside her retorted.

As Lux reflexively stepped back, before he was aware of it, other female students made a wall even behind him.

“Oops!?”

He was completely caught in a pincer attack.

“You have nowhere to escape. Give up.”

The large number of girls smiled as they were convinced of their victory.

Afterwards, it was no longer the outcome between Lux and the girls.

But, a fight between girls to know who would get the reward from the victory.

With the momentary opening that this state of war brought, Lux immediately put his hand on the side of a window.

“W-Wait a minute!? This is the third floor, you know!? ”

The eyes of the female students who had cornered him stared in surprise.

"I'm sorry. I'm a bit scared about what you'll do to me if I'm caught."

Immediately after, Lux jumped down outside of the school building through the open window.

"Aah!?"

Small screams rose from the female students who were there.

Lux kicked the outer wall in the middle of the fall, seized a branch of the tree on the other side in an instant, and landed after reducing the impact of the fall.

"Kuh…!? I-I guess the third floor was reckless indeed …"

Although he considerably reduced the impact of the fall, even so numbness ran throughout his body from the bottom of both his legs.

"But well, with this, I've considerably bought time—"

As Lux heaved a sigh of relief as such,

"He's there! Over here!"

The female students who heard the commotion further gathered from here and there.

“There are more people than before!? You’ve no mercy at all!? Even though my legs hurt from having just jumped down!”

While resuming his escape in panic, Lux was thinking in the corner of his head.

(W-Why do I have to go through this—!)

To know the cause of this festival, we must go back several minutes ago—

Part 2

“Lux-kun. How do you spend your school life?”

One day after school in May.

It was Principal Relie Aingram who called Lux to her room.

The Royal Military Academy of Drag-Knights existing in the first district of the Fort City Cross Feed.

It was an academy of noble girls that raised female Drag-Knights who had not been trained due to the system of excess androcracy of the Old Empire.

It was about only two weeks since Lux who was a Prince of the Old Empire was admitted into the academy, taking advantage of a certain incident.

An exceptional admission made by the New Kingdom Princess Lizsharte's strong demand, and the consent of the head of the academy Relie.

Lux, whose existence was accepted as the only male student at present in anticipation of a future coeducation, probably had troubles and problems in the field of cohabitation.

Hence, Relie called him like this to ask about it.

"I think I'm somehow doing well. I didn't know what to do in the beginning though."

Lux's answer was what he really thought.

Princess Lizsharte and most of the female students of this academy that originally had a hostile relationship with Lux treated him kindly now.

Even among the third-year students who came back from the practice at the Capital. While being surprised at Lux's presence, there was no one who raised an objection to Lux's admission after being told stories about the fact that he evenly matched Lisha in a duel ,and that he protected the students from the Abyss attack.

It seemed that they were watching the situation for the time being.

"Well, it might be thanks to the fact that Celis-san's return was delayed."

Relie said so at last with a bitter smile.

Celestia Ralgris, the top of the third-year students, the strongest of the academy and the daughter of a renowned Duke House.

She, who was from one of the four Great Nobles and seemed to be famous to be <--(for being) a man-hater, was left in the Capital for a little while for the subjugation of insurgents discovered over there.

Therefore, Lux was able to lead a peaceful school life for now, but—

"But you know, Lux-kun. Many students' complaints towards you have gathered now at my place."

"Eh…?"

Relie suddenly sighed with a troubled expression.

Did I do something wrong?

Or were there after all objections among the third-year students regarding Lux's enrollment—

When such an uneasiness crossed Lux's chest,

"Ta-da! Yes, this!"

- Bang*

With a smile all over her face, Relie slapped a thick bunch of papers onto the desk.

There were probably more than 100 sheets.

"Errr… Could it be that these are—"

The criminal Lux, who was a Prince of the Old Empire signed a certain contract at the same time with an acquittal as the amnesty by the New Kingdom.

The obligation in which he must undertake odd jobs from anyone of the nation, and do works as a “Chore Prince”.

That work was currently performed in the form of “ handling the requests of this academy's staff including student's”, but—

“These are odd jobs requests to you. There are too many, eh… Therefore, it was decided that you would handle them by choosing requests you consider high priority. But, if they pile up this much…”

“……”

As Lux stiffened with an indescribable expression, Relie showed a mischievous smile.

I-I’ve a bad feeling…

From his past experiences, Relie making this face, was always thinking about nothing good.

"B-But, it can't be helped—"

When Lux tried to explain in a hurry, shouts from female students could be heard somewhere.

"……?"

The source of the voices seemed to be from the classrooms in the school building and the school premises, but—

"I know that. That's why I'm now explaining it to the students. The event that I planned — the "Lux-kun contest", that is."

"…Huh?"

As Lux looked puzzled to these words, Relie spread one red request form on the desk.

"An event of canceling dissatisfaction of students whose requests aren't received by you. "A special request form, whose request is able to have priority over Lux-kun for only one week" — in other words, the girl who snatches this away from you within a time limit can monopolize you for one week."

"I-It's a joke, isn't it!? Don't tell me you seriously—"

Lux's face unintentionally became stiff.

Relie, not answering his question, showed a smile all over her face.

"The game's time is one hour from now. I leave this request form to you; so you won't have to hear orders from anyone if you manage to hold on until the time limit. Ah, you are all prohibited from using Drag-Rides, so you must not let the young ladies hurt themselves as much as possible, okay?"

"P-Please, wait a minute!? To suddenly say that—"

No matter how you put it, it's unreasonable.

When Lux was going to rebut so, a sound like that of the ground rumbling could be heard outside of the Principal room.

"Oh my? Everybody seemed to have come over at once. If you don't run away quickly, you'll be caught immediately."

"What are you thinking, really!"

The next moment, Lux jumped out of the Principal's room and began to run.

Soon after, shouts arose from female students who were going up the stairs of the school building.

Thus, the “Lux contest” which was Principal Relie’s plan started.

Part 3

And, after having run around the school premises from place to place for about 40 minutes from the start, he was at last cornered in the corridor of the school building and he jumped off outside—

In addition, Lux avoided the female students who gathered there and fled.

Since it seemed to be a violation of the rules to leave the school premises, danger always remained.

“Haa…, haa…!”

It was good that he somehow escaped from the predicament, but as expected he was out of breath.

Even though he had stamina thanks to the fact that he had been handling odd jobs since a long time ago, it was unbearable when being targeted by the female students in the academy.

There was also the option where he could let himself be caught and hand over the request form, but as far as he could see the girls were in a festive mood, it looked like he would be made to do a ridiculous request and he felt like it was bad.

"…!? That's—"

Lux who found a familiar girl promptly hid behind a weedy thicket.

"…Fufu"

When she lightly winked as she caught a glimpse of Lux who was hiding, she went into a building different from the school building.

(That place is—)

"……"

Lux understanding that the girl's wink was a signal to him began to walk slowly as he slipped through the surrounding stares.

And he ran into the big building where she entered.

A large stone-built space where the smell of metal and oil drifted.

In front of the central work unit, a small-sized girl wearing a white gown was sitting with a smile.

"Yo."

The chief of the building greeted as she raised one hand.

Lizsharte Atismata.

The girl, who was the New Kingdom Princess and a genius engineer of Drag-Rides, looked at Lux who entered and showed a sweet smile.

"Errr…, um"

"Don't be so scared. You want help, right? You can hide here for a while if you want."

Lisha said so and once again moved her look to the work unit.

"T-Thank you. Then, I will accept your offer."

While heaving a sigh of relief, Lux sat down on the nearby sofa.

Other unrelated students couldn't enter the Machine Dragon development atelier without the permission of Lisha who was the chief.

In other words, it was the safest place now in the school premises where the "Lux contest" was held.

As long as Lisha herself did not set up something—

(Well, I don' think that Lisha-sama whom I'm usually with a lot would participate in this contest, but—)

Thinking so, Lux suddenly relaxed his whole body and slightly leaned down.

"Are you making something again?"

A disassembled green Drag-Ride was put on the work unit before Lisha.

"Ah, this is a new experiment."

For a small-sized body, Lisha who greatly stuck out her chest replied so.

"…An experiment?"

"Yes. Shall I show you a little?"

As Lisha suddenly smiled, she picked up a Sword Device on her side.

At that moment, the silver line which ran through the surface of the sword blade shone with a pale light.

"Capture him! <Arms Wyrm>!"

"Eh…?"

Gashii!

The moment when Lux cocked his head in puzzlement , the Drag-Ride which was on the work unit changed into the shape of a huge arm and grappled hold his body.

As Lux stared in wonder at the unexpected occurrence,

"Fufu. You fell for it, Chore Prince. As expected, you're too soft-hearted."

Like a child whose trick succeeded, Lisha turned an innocent smile.

And with a finger, she morosely poked at the waist of Lux who was raised in the air.

"W-What is this!? This Machine Dragon — or rather do you possibly intend to catch me…!?"

"Well, yes. It didn't feel like I could catch you by squarely running after you. I used a technique still under study where I can operate a Drag-Ride to some extent without equipping it."

"Wasn't the use of Drag-Rides prohibited in the rules of this time?"

"Yes. Like I said, I'm not wearing it, look."

(T-That's plainly cheating…!)

Lux wondered whether that was the way of thinking of a Princess, but now that he was captured by the Drag-Ride like this, there was no helping it.

"Or rather, even if you don't participate in something like the "contest", haven't I properly received Lisha-sama 's requests until now!?"

As Lux said so, trying to persuade her,

"I-It isn't really like that. I may not look like this, but e-even I'm usually holding back myself… Besides, there are also things to consider in the future, and I can't hand you to other people—"

Lisha who blushed bashfully twined the fingers of both her hands and muttered so.

"W-With that said, resign yourself. Even if it's you, you can't escape from a Machine Dragon's restraint without equipment."

Lisha thrust her hands into Lux's clothes and began to touch them as she looked for the red request form.

"Let's see. That request thing, where is it—"

"H-Hey, please stop…!? I surrender!"

To the touch of her small smooth hands stroking within his clothes, Lux began to feel strange, but, he somehow endured it and spoke.

"The request is in my coat which is held by the Machine Dragon's hand, so—"

"I see. All right, I understand."

Lisha raised the Sword Device and made a mind operation by thought.

The moment when the restraint of the <Armed Wyrm > grasping Lux's body loosened,

"I'm sorry. Lisha-sama—"

"…Wha!?"

Lux slipped through the Machine Dragon's hand by using that slight opening.

He kicked the stone-paved floor at the same time as the landing, flew and quickly went out of the atelier.

"Thats sly, Lux! Waiiiit!"

"We're even!"

Lux ran as to shake off Lisha chasing him with teary eyes.

As he shook off the chase of the female students who were outside, and somehow hid between the bush of plants and the wall of the Machine Dragon Hangar,

"…Ah, it's Lu-chan."

"Uwah!?"

A young girl was standing on the side of the brick wall
.

"What the, Philphie!? Why are you here—?"

Lux's childhood friend who always had a fluffy, loose atmosphere, Philphie Aingram.

The impressive girl with pink hair and a big chest was chewing a snack-like rusk.

As Lux unintentionally halted at this meeting in an unexpected place,

"It's Phi-chan, right?"

While expressionless, she said so in a voice mixed with a slightly sullen nuance.

Among his close friends, she asked for a relationship where they called each other by their nicknames.

It was less objectionable now since there wasn't the public eye, but it was pretty embarrassing because he was coerced even in the classroom

"S-Sorry… But, Phi-chan. Why on earth are you in such a place—?"

Since Philphie had for better or worse an easy-going character, it was hard to think that she would participate in this event.

When Lux asked so as he was puzzled,

"It's for cake. *gulp*…"

"…Yes?"

Swallowing the rusk which was in her hand, Philphie said something which he did not understand well.

"It's because Onee-chan said that she would give me cake if I caught Lu-chan."

"W-What is that person thinking…!?"

Lux was bewildered at Philphie's mutter.

Going as far as to incite her own little sister; is she really the Principal?

(…No, Even Philphie who is lured by one cake is also to blame though.)

"With that said, I'm coming."

Philphie took a stance with unhurried movements.

In the Royal Military Academy, one learnt not only handling as a Drag-Knight, but also taijutsu and fencing for self-defense.

Lux had never properly seen Philphie fight, but—

(Philphie is a girl and she seems not very good at exercise, so I can probably dodge with my legs.)

Thinking so, Lux planned to breakthrough head on.

Since he would be found by other students if he dodged her too greatly, he planned to forcibly go through Philphie's side.

"Phi-chan. It's dangerous, so be careful."

"Yes. Understood."

As he urged her so, Lux started running.

When he was going to slip through Philphie's flank as he kicked the hard ground and changed the trajectory—

"I'll be careful not to hurt you."

"Eh—?"

She whispered in a subdued voice close to his ears and Lux noticed for the first time.

About the fact that Philphie was bending his joints behind him to the extreme, as she grasped Lux's wrist when he tried to run through her.

Furthermore, she quickly took his remaining arm with her other hand and entangled one of her leg around Lux' s legs.

Lux's movement was completely sealed in an instant.

(W-what was that? That movement just now—!?)

Philphie's movement was by no means fast.

Rather, it was a movement which could be said to be loose, and yet Lux could not avoid it at all.

Fluent movements without any waste at all, like a feather fluttering about in running water or midair.

With her beautiful taijutsu, she easily caught Lux.

"Kuh…!? —Or rather, I can't move at all!?"

Since his childhood friend was the opponent, he intended to not act violently as much as possible from the start.

But, as he put all his energy to undo the restraint with brute force, Lux was not able to move an inch.

"Just for a note, it's been about seven years, since I learned martial arts a little."

In a serene tone, Philphie whispered.

"I-Is that so!?"

Lux was surprised at the revelation of the unexpected fact.

However, aside from her refined taijutsu, is this superhuman strength a talent?

Even though he did not feel that she did not put that much power, he could not move at all.

Like the power difference between an adult and a child.

"Thank god. Like this, I can also eat the cake together with Lu-chan."

Holding Lux's body as such, Philphie smiled slightly joyfully.

The swelling of Philphie's chest pressing from behind was squashed with a sweet sensation.

(A-As expected, Philphie's are pretty big…!)

Towards the feel of those two with elasticity, whose contents were plumply jam-packed, Lux felt his heartbeat speeding up.

In a sense, at this rate it was a situation where it seemed like it would become painful indefinitely, but—

"Ah, the request…"

At that instant, a red request felt to the floor from Lux' s chest.

When Philphie stretched out her hand to pick it up at once—

"Ah…"

Rapidly removing the restraint, Lux succeeded in escaping.

"Sorry. Philphie!"

As he quickly collected the request with the momentum, Lux ran through the shadow of the Machine Dragon Hangar.

"Haa, haa… It's becoming gradually hard..!"

Although he somehow managed to escape from Philphie, Lux's stamina was already at his limit.

While hiding from the female students still looking for him, he headed to the waiting room of the practice field.

(Wait — if it's now when lessons are over, there should be no one!)

Lux thought so and crept in the waiting room.

As expected, there was no one in that wide space.

"…All right"

So as not to be found, he moved to the other side of the compartment for changing clothes just in case.

"Haa…!"

As he hid himself sitting on the wooden floor, Lux heaved a long sigh.

Another 10 minutes like this and the game will be over.

When Lux thought so, the sound of the door opening could be heard.

"____"

Lux promptly stopped his breath and erased his presence.

He wondered whether it was some kind of mistake that a female student came here now, but—,

"Haa, it became really unpleasant, eh. Even though now is a rare chance to catch Lux-kun—"

"Ahaha. Well, it can't be helped; the Drag-Ride's repair is over, so I have to properly to test it—"

Judging from the voices, there were about five or six people who came over.

They seemed to be female students who were members of the academy guerilla squad, the "Knight Squadron".

It looked like the Machine Dragons' test run which was not scheduled would be rapidly carried out.

(W-What to do? at this rate—)

Unfortunately, since the door and windows were far from the back of the compartment, there was no way to go out without exposing himself before the girls.

(Even if I hide here, they should come to this side of the compartment after changing into the Dress Gear. So, I should already stop hiding—)

The moment when Lux resolved himself so,

The sound of the rustling of clothes could be heard.

(Eh…? Eeeeeeeeh…!?)

"Oh my, that underwear is pretty. In which store did you buy it? I'm envious, eh."

"D-Don't look at me too much… It's embarrassing—"

"What are you talking about? Even though you have such a splendid thing unlike me."

To the girls' innocent voices, Lux's heart throbbed.

Don't tell me it's the ones I think it is—

Lux stealthily peeped on the other side from the shadow of the compartment.

"…!?"

There was a heaven-like sight there.

There were familiar female students of the “Knight Squadron” and probably unfamiliar third-year members.

All of them took off their uniforms and were joking with each other in underwear.

(…W-What is it!? Why are they already getting dressed up!?)

When Lux’s head was about to become blank, he finally understood the reason.

In this academy where there were basically only female students, those expressly changing their clothes behind the compartment were few.

Moreover, Lux who was the only male student had not officially joined the “Knight Squadron” yet.

Now when only the members of the “Knight Squadron ” use the waiting room after school, it was inevitable that it became so.

(W-What to do…!? I can’t go out from here…!)

If there is any student who comes on this side of the compartment on a whim—

"—Speaking of which, that boy of the rumor. Was he called Lux Acadia? Is it really all right to let him attend this academy?"

He suddenly heard such a voice of a female student who seemed to be a third-year student.

Though there was no anger or displeasure, her tone of voice was tinged with caution.

They received tyranny and discrimination from the Old Empire just only five years ago, so for a third-year student who did not know Lux well, they were reasonable words, but—

"Hmm. When trying to speak to him, he's a really humble and good person. Also as a Drag-Knight, he's pretty amazing—"

"Yes, besides precisely because he is a former Prince, he also has a cute face—"

"Hmm. But, isn't there any worry of him being a pervert and peeping tom? Like he looked at you with

indecent eyes. After all — most of the “men” are such creatures, right?”

To the words praising Lux, the voice of another girl who seemed to be a third-year student rebutted.

But,

“No, there is no such thing in the Lux-kun's case! I don ’t think that he will do such cowardly things!”

“Yes—. We, who have seen his way of fighting, trust him.”

He was very happy that the second-year student members supported him, but

(Wait, it becomes more and more a situation where I can’t afford to be found…!)

When, although unexpected, Lux harbored feelings of guilt about the fact that he had seen them in their underwear,

“Ah, Krulcifer-san. Good morning.”

To a bright voice emitted by a female student who was changing her clothes, Lux's body froze in surprise.

Krulcifer Einvolk.

A foreign student of the academy and daughter of an earl of Ymir, a large and religious country of the North.

A mysterious girl with perfect beauty and ability.

Lux panicked even more since even a girl who was his classmate came.

(This is bad! I have to get out of here as soon as possible by any means—)

However, not eventually coming up with any way to evade well, time passed.

"Speaking of which, Krulcifer-san. The Drag-Ride's guidebook. Do you know where it is? If I remember correctly, I think that I had put many volumes in this room, but—"

"Yes… The book would get damaged if exposed to sunlight, so I think I put it here—"

Soon after this voice could be heard,

“—Eh?”

“Ah…!?”

仕切りのこちら側に
やってきた少女と、
ルクスは目が合ってしまった。
制服の上下を既に脱いでいた、
下着姿のクルルシファーと。

「……え？」

The eyes of the girl who came to the other side of the compartment and Lux's met.

It was Krulcifer who had already taken off the top and bottom of her uniform, and was in underwear.

"…!?"

For a moment, Krulcifer looked at Lux with a surprised face.

The cheeks of the usually composed girl slightly reddened in embarrassment.

Similarly, Lux averted his eyes from her while confused to the point that he could not even utter his voice.

A slender body without any waste at all.

However, a bodily build with a chest and hips which let one feel a feminine freshness.

Bewitching snow-like skin and a sweet fragrance of perfume slightly drifting.

Krulcifer's appearance in underwear that he saw for the first time was preposterously attractive and beautiful.

But,

(—It's over)

Immediately after, Lux's face quickly turned pale.

At this rate, Lux would be handed over as a peeping tom and expelled from the academy.

Inside a cage as a criminal who betrayed the girls' trust —

"Krulcifer-san. What's wrong? Is something the matter ?"

When such despair floated across his mind, he heard the voice of a female student from the other side of the compartment.

Lux promptly hung his head as he prepared himself for the worst, but—

"—It's nothing. I found the guidebook."

Krulcifer returned her usually refreshing expression and walked to Lux's side.

And when she picked up the book put nearby, she returned to the other side of the compartment as if nothing happened.

(Eh…?)

"I will quit today's training after all. I remembered that <Fafnir>'s maintenance wasn't over yet, so—"

"Is that so? Then, we're going."

After Krulcifer said so, the presences disappeared from the waiting room with lively voices.

The other female students, who were inside, seemed to have gone to the practice field.

"Um—"

As Lux timidly let his face peek from the compartment ,

"It's all right now. Cute peeping tom."

Krulcifer had put back on her uniform and was reading a book before the table.

Making a small smile on her mouth, she sent a fleeting glance at Lux.

From that gesture, Lux was able to grasp her intention.

"…Um, thank you."

As Lux thanked her for having helped him,

"If you are so pleased, then it was worth it that I have also felt embarrassed."

Being said so in a teasing tone, Lux's face turned red.

"I didn't say thank you in that sense, um—"

"Oh my! Didn't you have any interest in my naked body? Considering that, you seemed to be fairly looking thoroughly though."

Krulcifer coiled herself with sweet voice as to feel even composure.

(S-She noticed my eyes…!?)

"ah, uh…, errr — I'm sorry."

As Lux, not being able to endure it, apologized, Krulcifer suddenly returned a serious face,

"It looks like I pushed the teasing a little far. It's a bad habit of mine."

As to let Lux calm down, she softly put her index finger at the seat next to her.

It was a signal to ask him to sit beside her.

"Errr, do you forgive me?"

"Yes, I intend to do so, but— I wonder why; but when I'm looking at you, I want to tease you so badly. There is no malice, so it will save me if you don't let it bother you. "

"……"

Krulcifer's words which were muttered with a smile were probably her true intentions.

However,

(It's quite bad for my heart…)

While having mixed feelings, Lux sat down next to her .

"—But, you should be a little more careful. You're at present the only boy in this academy after all."

"I'm reflecting (on it)…"

Seeing Lux hanging his head, Krulcifer happily muttered "then, it's fine".

Then, she closed the book she was reading and turned her gaze to Lux beside her.

"Since it's a rare opportunity, why don't you rest a little? I also happen to have something I want to ask you. "

"Ah, but I'm—. Now is, um…"

"It seems that the bell to inform of the end of the event called your contest rang a while ago."

"Eh…?"

As he was said so and looked at the clock of the waiting room, it was certainly past the end time.

Since he had been in panic, Lux might have failed to hear the bell ring for the signal of the end.

"At last, it's over… Haaa…!"

When Lux lay down on the desk, Krulcifer chuckled.

"Haven't you lost that request? It wouldn't a laughable matter if it was inadvertently taken."

"Ah, that's also true. I'll check whether I properly have it—"

To confirm it, Lux took out the special request from his pocket and put it on the table.

The request in which a blank space, where the winner who became a client would write, remained was safe without being taken by anyone.

"Really, thank you very much. Krulcifer-san"

"Is that so? I don't think that you really need to thank me. After all—"

Krulcifer's smile was returned to the relieved Lux. At that time,

"Eh?"

- Bang*! The waiting room's door opened vigorously.

"I found you at last, Lux! Now, quickly hand that request to me—!"

When looking, including Lisha at the vanguard, a great number of female students had gathered at the entrance.

(Huh? It should have been over; and yet why—?)

Soon after Lux cocked his head in puzzlement,

"It's the end time! The female student who has the red request now gets the privilege to do as she pleases to Lux-kun for one week!"

The voice of the female student in charge of the event could be heard along with the high-pitched sound of the bell.

"Eeeeeh…!? What on earth does this mean—"

"That's why I told you, right? That you should be a little more careful."

The moment when Lux looked back, the answer was there.

Krulcifer who had the red request of the "Lux contest" was smiling calmly.

The moment they saw it, the large number of students raised high-pitched screams "kyaaaaah!".

"W-Why…!? But, the time of the clock has already—"

"You just tamper a little with the needles, then it's over ."

He was said so without hesitation with Krulcifer's serious look.

"……"

(I-I was completely tricked…!)

As the fatigue until now assailed at a stretch, Lux sank down to the floor as such.

He was thinking that Krulcifer had no interest in such things…

Krulcifer's victory was declared by the person in charge after she filled out the red request.

"With that said, I will have you listen to what I say for one week. I'll count on you."

"Ah…, please treat me well."

With a countenance as if his soul came out, Lux somehow answered.

Immediately after, the surrounding female students got excited and showed various reactions such as " congratulations!", "as expected of you", "to think that even Krulcifer-san was aiming for him—"

While the cheers of the female students surrounded the two of them, Krulcifer turned around to Lux.

"By the way, Lux-kun. May I make a request at once?"

"Ah, yes… If it is something that I can do—"

As Lux stood up, he replied so with a half negligent state of mind.

Then, Krulcifer showed a graceful smile and softly let a finger crawl over Lux's chest.

"I want you to become my lover for one week from now. That is my request."

"—Eh?"

It was not only Lux, the person concerned who stiffened.

- shiiii*……

The atmosphere of the waiting room fell silent; after several seconds, it became a big commotion again and exploded.

"Kyaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaah!"

Soon after high-pitched screams resounded, the female students who happened to be present raised their voices unanimously.

"It's amazing! Even such a request can be done, eh" " What should we do? With Krulcifer-san as opponent, it doesn't seem like we can win—" "Wait. If you think conversely, can't it be said that it was an unprecedented? " "Yes, let's hope for a next contest!"

While such words flew about among the girls,

"—That being said, please take care of me."

As she whispered so to the panicked Lux, Krulcifer left the waiting room.

"Eh…, wait!? Krulcifer-san?"

"Hey, Lux!? What is the meaning of this?! Even though you already have me—"

For some reason, Lisha flared up at him with teary eyes, but honestly, Lux did not understand it either.

"Errr…, I don't understand, either."

While defending himself as he was troubled, Lux was thinking in the corner of his head.

(…What did she mean by that?)

『—I'll give you the details later.

Krulcifer's last words which she had said when leaving remained in Lux's ears for a while.

Episode 1 – Engagement Circumstances of the Daughter of the North

Part 1

"Haa… Really Nii-san, what on earth are you thinking about?"

In a voice mixed with frustration and anger, Airi heaved a big sigh.

The girl, Lux's little sister, who had a doll-like beauty, was staring at Lux with reproachful eyes as she stood up before him who was for some reason kneeled on the floor .

"I told you many times not to stand out, right? Because of you, just now I was tormented by my classmates as they asked me "did your brother find a lover!?"…"

"Yes. I understand your feelings, Airi. But, please let's leave it as that."

Nokuto, Airi's roommate who was beside her, was a calm girl who was also one of the three members of the academy famous trio called the "Triad".

Being soothed by her, Airi finally muttered “I think you’ve already reflected on this, Nii-san”.

“I’m really sorry…”

Saying so, Lux stood up with a tired face.

Here was the site of the Royal Military Academy, in one of the girl dormitory’s room.

Lux, who finished eating dinner after the end of the “ Lux contest”, had been called by his little sister Airi in order to handle a certain request of the academy.

Since he was told that it was an important request, he hurriedly went to Airi’s and Nokuto’s room, but what was awaiting him was his little sister’s sermon.

“In the first place, why didn’t you come directly to my place? If you did so, we would have settled it between us siblings, and it wouldn’t have become such uproar.”

Airi seemed quite displeased by the behavior of her big brother who did not seek her help.

There seemed to be also many people in the girl's dormitory, so it was certainly a blunder that the choice of escaping to Airi's room did not occurred to him, but—[1]

(If by any chance I was also caught by Airi, it was likely to become troublesome, so…)

If he was to say so, he would have been scolded by " are you going to doubt a blood relative?", so he said nothing.

"However, personally, I was surprised. I thought that Krulcifer-san asking Lux-san out was unlikely, considering her character."

Nokuto calmly spoke of her impression.

But, the shoulders of Airi who heard it suddenly shook .

"So Nii-san, what kind of happy time are you going to spend with her from now on?"

"E-Errr— basically, it won't be different from the requests I've done so far probably, I guess?"

While trembling to the strangely gentle smile of Airi, Lux said so with a perfunctory look.

To the request of Krulcifer who won the “Lux contest”, the agreement of “becoming her lover” for about one week was established.

However, the content was very vague, so except listening to her request preferentially, he should be able to spend his life as usual.

When Lux finished explaining so to the two girls,

“Hmm. Well, it’s fine. Nii-san is already at that age after all.”

“N-No, it isn’t really me who asks Krulcifer-san this time!”

To Airi who turned away her gaze as she pouted, Lux explained confusedly.

“Yes. I cannot surmise Krulcifer-san’s real intention, but I think it can’t be helped.”

“Is that so?”

Looking at Airi who raised her face to Nokuto's follow up, Lux was relieved for an instant.

"Yes. Be that as it may, Lux-san seems certainly weak to a girl's aggressiveness though."

"Hey!? Even though it was about to be settled with much trouble, why do you say such a thing again!?"

''As expected even this Nokuto girl is a very difficult child to deal with.''

As Lux was once again troubled, Airi lightly cleared her throat and stood up.

"About that, I will have you tell me about this matter in detail some other time. It's time to go to the place of the request."

"Ah…, t-that's right."

Relieved about the fact that this talk was over for the time being, Lux left the room.

"I heard that it's a request at the school site; but it's night, so be careful."

Nokuto said so and saw off Lux and Airi.

When he was outside of the girl's dormitory with Airi, the neighborhood was already covered with a jet black curtain.

"It is good and all that you enjoy your school life, but please do not forget. About our "plan"—"

As they were now both alone, Airi said so as she remembered.

"Ah…, yes. I know."

He intended to consult her a little about something, but in the end, he hesitated to talk about it.

"Phew…"

While walking along the lawn within the academy as he followed after Airi, Lux sighed softly.

It was about Krulcifer that he was troubled.

(—What may I do to behave like her lover?)

''I mean, I have never gone out with anyone…''

The “true request” which was told by Krulcifer after that lover declaration.

Lux hung his head as he was troubled by that request which was on a whole other level from the odd jobs he had done so far.

Part 2

“—I want you to act as my lover.”

About ten minutes after he was asked of that in the waiting room.

Lux who was called to the deserted rooftop of the academy was hearing about the details from Krulcifer.

“Pretend to be Krulcifer-san’s lover…?”

“Yes, that’s right. I want you to play that role for one week starting today.”

“B-But, why should I do such a thing—”

As Lux was perplexed at Krulcifer who said so indifferently, she explained the situation in detail.

Krulcifer was an Earl's daughter of the large country of the North — the religious country Ymir, and a foreign student in the academy.

One of the reasons why she came to this New Kingdom to study was because she had an important goal to achieve.

"In short, a political marriage of convenience."

『During attendance at school, conclude an engagement with a high ranking noble in the New Kingdom. —Or get married.

Such instructions had been given to Krulcifer by the Einvolk House which was her home.

Making connections with an influential person holding a strong position in the New Kingdom.

She was enrolled in this academy not only to learn knowledge and technique as a Drag-Knight, but also with such an intention since the beginning.

"That's—. Such a thing is…"

''Isn't it too selfish?''

''No matter how much the Einvolk House is a prestigious noble family, to let Krulcifer go alone to a foreign ground and burden her with such a duty…''

As Lux unintentionally started to say so,

"As usual, you say something unlike a Prince of the Old Empire."

Seeing Lux's expression which showed that he did not consent, Krulcifer chuckled.

"Marriages between nobles are 90% like that. It's no use even if you mind it."

She asserted in a curt tone.

"……"

About that, Krulcifer was right.

A marriage between nobles was basically like that regardless of nationality.

Lux who had been in the Imperial Court as a Prince of the Old Empire before, understood it only too well.

‘‘But still, it’s strange.’’

“But then, why do you want me to pretend to be your lover?”

“To put it plainly, I want to avoid trouble to the limit. Until I achieve my personal goal—”

“Personal goal…?”

Not answering Lux’s question, Krulcifer continued.

“Several days later, it’s scheduled that a messenger will be dispatched to this Fort City by the Einvolk House which is my home. In order to confirm and report the progress of my engagement—”

In short, it seemed to be about a “lover role” in order to deceive the messenger coming over.

A man who was of noble lineage as well and also had a connection with Krulcifer.

Lux seemed to have been chosen based on the above conditions.

"Therefore, I will have you behave as my lover for one week from today on. So, is it all right?"

"B-But, I — um, I've never gone out with anyone…"

"Oh my? Actually, I don't have any experience, either."

"I-I don't mean that—"

As Lux was flustered,

"Besides, it can't also be just with anyone, right? You have seen my shameful side—"

Slightly blushing, Krulcifer softly smiled.

"…!?"

Suddenly recalling her figure in underwear in the waiting room, Lux's face became red.

"If you say that you won't take responsibility no matter what, then I will tell everyone about your peeping ."

She whispered so with a mischievous tone.

At her tone of voice which tickled his earlobe, Lux gave up immediately.

"U-Um…, if you're fine with me, I'll do my best."

"Thank you. I like that honest side of yours."

To Lux who hung his head, Krulcifer replied with a smile.

"I will be troubled if the fake lover thing was leaked to someone, so until this week passes, we will keep this matter secret. Can you promise that?"

"U-Understood."

"Good answer. Then — from today on, you are my lover. Please take of me, Lux-kun."

"…Yes"

To Krulcifer's smile, Lux returned an awkward smile.

Thus, the agreement was established.

Part 3

The library in the academy was built separately from the school building.

Though he had several times used it because of the academy's lessons, this was the first time that he came there this late at night.

"Over there, Nii-san."

Since the front door was already closed, he entered from the back entrance following Airi's lead.

The space where high, innumerable bookshelves stood in a row and the old-fashion which let one feel history somewhere were of a structure harking back to an ancient labyrinth.

He had the experience of being a librarian due to odd jobs in the past, so there was no resistance in particular about this atmosphere itself, but—

"Is there really a request here?"

A question concerning the request of the deserted library floated in Lux's mind.

"Yes, there's no mistake. It's a little bit ahead."

They went through a passage between bookshelves and arrived at a door at the end.

Then, she opened the door with a key different from that she used to open the back entrance.

When they went down the stairs leading to the underground, there was a large stone space there.

"This place is…? Is there such a place in the underground of the library?"

A place which he didn't even know the existence of let alone entered due to odd jobs.

Over there, not only bookshelves, but also an iron work unit, a furnace for sublimation as well as countless experimental devices lined up.

At the same time, there was also the smell of acrid chemicals.

"Please, keep this place's existence secret, Nii-san. It's also a small laboratory after all."

"Laboratory?"

Though Lux asked back, he thought that it really gave such an impression.

The Drag-Knight's atelier where Lisha acted as the chief.

If Lisha's atelier had a structure somewhere reminiscent to a blacksmith's, this place seemed just like an atelier of an alchemist.

As he followed Airi while holding such an impression,

"I was waiting for both of you."

Principal Relie Aingram was in front of a small table.

"Good evening, Lux-kun. Do you properly look after Philphie? Or — have you already attacked[2] her?"

"Really, you…"

Lux replied with an indescribable expression.

By Relie's arrangement, Lux was staying even now in the same room as Philphie, her little sister, in the girl's dormitory.

As Lux blushed when recalling it—,

"Principal. Why don't you leave your teasing of Nii-san for another time and begin the talk?"

- cough*, deliberately clearing her throat once, Airi said so.

"Well, that's also right. Then, I will ask you not to speak about what I'm about to tell you from here on."

When Relie said so, she placed a small metal box on the table and inserted a key in the lock.

"It's fairly secure, eh."

"Yes."

As Relie opened the box while nodding back, it could be seen.

"Don't tell this is—"

What was inside the box was a strange-shaped golden flute.

"Yes, it's the thing which the former Imperial Guards Knight Squadron Chief Velvet, who attacked this city two weeks ago, held."

This flute possessed the power to summon and control the mythical beasts — Abysses which appeared from the ruins.

Lux and the "Knight Squadron" witnessed it and fought with them just the other day.

"By the way, I reported it to the top brass, but I was told by Her Majesty Queen Raffi to have you study it while advancing the analysis here as this place is closer to the ruins."

"……"

"It seems that Velvet confessed that he bought this from a foreign merchant. He says that it's called "horn". Do you know anything about this, Lux-kun?"

"No. It's also the first time for me to see it up close like this. But—"

His older brother Fugil of the Old Empire that Lux was after.

Judging from the words "summon the Abysses" that Fugil had said, there was no doubt about the fact that this horn was an important treasure related to the ruins.

"That Velvet didn't seem to know anything else, but I think that it's necessary to analyze this item at the same time as the investigation of the ruins."

Airi added so while opening a thick book — a document related to the investigation of ruins.

"Then, why having shown this to me—"

"Because I will have you hold onto this."

Relie calmly said and closed the box containing the horn.

"Eh…?"

"I haven't told everyone yet, but — these past several days, there is a little movement on the continent. So, I will have you, and members of the "Knight Squadron", head to the investigation of the ruins before long."

"……"

More than ten years ago — the ruins brought Drag-Rides and a number of technologies into the world.

In that place which was protected by the existence called Abyss, many records and treasures are still sleeping.

"Even including the ruins of the Atismata New Kingdom territory, it's the present situation is that humans have only gotten until the second layer in the ruins, but it is written that to reach the third layer, an existence called "key" is necessary."

Airi spoke so with the thick ancient document at hand.

It was known that each country's civil officials had already explained the existence of a "key" in itself, but its true nature has not been established even now.

"Perhaps — this horn is the key to enter into the depths of the ruins. Or, it may become something to defend ourselves from the Abysses. Something like that, that also includes the investigation. Therefore, I intend to entrust you with this, Nii-san."

Lux noticed the intention of Airi who included an implication.

She meant that this horn might become a clue for searching for Fugil.

"…I understand."

While engraving her words into his heart, Lux received the horn.

"By the way, Principal."

"Oh, it's fine if you call me Relie at such times. Otherwise, I don't mind even if you call me sister-in-law–_"

Smiling wryly to Relie who teasingly said so, Lux asked what had been bothering him.

"Relie-san. I'm not yet a member of the "Knight Squadron". I may not be granted permission to accompany the ruins' investigation."

"Don't worry about it. I will give only you a special permission for accompanying after all. There is also the achievement of having saved Lisha-sama, so I don't think anyone will be against it."

"……"

''She is good as usual when it comes to preparation at such times.''

"However, can I have you keep this matter still secret to other students? It's a fairly important issue after all."

"…Yes."

As he replied with a slight tension, the three of them went up the stairs of the basement.

"Besides, also regarding the ruins' investigation, I want results for the new layer soon. As a matter of fact, also for that child[3]—"

Turning a somewhat distant look into empty space, Relie muttered so.

After having parted from Relie, Lux went out of the library along with Airi.

With no trace of anybody in the neighborhood, a pale moonlight was illuminating the path to the girl's dormitory.

"It may be only today that I can be with Nii-san in this way. You will have Krulcifer-san from tomorrow on after all."

"Errr… Airi, I don't think what you're saying will happen though…"

To Airi's words which posed as a joke, Lux replied so while smiling wryly.

"But, please be careful. Especially— of her."

"By her… you mean Krulcifer-san? She's amazing in various ways, but I don't think she's a bad person."

"Maybe. It's just a woman's intuition. It's somehow bothers me. Not only the fact that she is a foreign student from Ymir, but it's also as if she is hiding something—"

To Airi's mutter, Lux walked while looking puzzled.

When they returned to the entrance of the girl's dormitory, they decided to part ways there.

"Well, Airi. See you later."

"Yes. Please be careful, too, Nii-san. I have discussed with them for the time being."

"Eh…?"

"No, it's nothing, Nii-san."

Leaving behind a meaningful smile, Airi left.

It was the usual Airi, but Lux noticed her last concern said in a stronger tone.

The obtained horn and ruins' investigations which aren't progressing.

Though just to a few people, The "Black Hero's" real identity was revealed.

The time which had stopped began to move little by little.

Part 4

"Hey, Lux-kun. May we eat lunch together?"

"Ah, yes. That's fine by me, but—"

The next day at lunch break.

When Lux was thinking about the ruins' investigation, Krulcifer came over to his seat.

Acting as her "lover" for one week.

For Lux who knew of that agreement, this was certainly natural; but as expected when being invited by a beautiful girl like Krulcifer, it makes one's heart beat fast.

"Ah, so Krulcifer-san wasn't joking after all."

"Yes, to think that that girl was so assertive… She's serious."

The classroom was astir and the female students raised their voices so unanimously.

(Not good, this conversation attracts attention too much…!)

As Lux confusedly stood up and was about to leave the classroom,

"Hey both of you, wait a minute."

Lisha suddenly stood in front of Lux and Krulcifer.

The New Kingdom Princess with blond hair tied to the side and deep crimson pupils.

In this academy, she was given treatment in no way different to that of other students, but as expected the students' attention gathered.

"What do you want?"

"I have to talk to Lux a little, not you. So, you don't mind if I also accompany you to the dining room, right?"

"Ah, if it's only that—"

Before Lux could agreed,

"Sorry, but I will have to refuse."

Krulcifer calmly declared so.

"Wha…!?"

"Today, I want to talk with him, just the two of us. He became my "lover" for one week, so I have at least such a right, haven't I?"

"Guh…"

Lisha's face became stiff.

"Well then, excuse us. Princess"

Krulcifer pulled Lux out of the classroom.

"Guh, I'll remember this!"

While hearing Lisha's frustrated voice, the two people walked down the corridor.

As the foreign student Krulcifer and the man Lux sat down together on the seats of the dining room, just that was enough to attracted attention very much.

(As expected, I'd better pay extra attention to this request…)

Lux slowly ate lunch while thinking about such a thing .

Part 5

The afternoon class was a practice of battle form.

They headed to the practice field away from the school building and dormitory, changed into dress gear and wore Machine Dragons.

"Well then, today, we will mainly focus on the practical skill training for the campus selection battle, which will be held two weeks later."

When all the members of the class lined up, Instructor Raigree's dignified voice resounded in the wide practice field.

The ruins where ancient weapons and technology slept were not places where anyone could readily investigate.

The right and opportunity to excavate the ruins were formalized by an international agreement several years ago, and the national tournament results would decide who would have the ruins investigation rights.

Plainly speaking, the country which left the better results in the tournament could acquire more investigation rights.

The off campus tournament was held once every several months.

The campus selection battle in order to choose participants for it was going to begin soon.

Therefore, it seemed that it was scheduled to do training for actual fighting today, but—

"…Today three Drag-Knights have come from the capital's army as temporary instructors. Everybody, do not miss this opportunity, and properly learn."

By Instructor Raigree's introduction, the men entered the practice field.

Men wearing the regular army overcoat on their dress gears.

Their age was probably almost the same as Instructor Raigree, about twenty to thirty years.

The female students leaked whispering voices at the army's temporary instructor who was a man with a stern face standing at the vanguard of the other two.

"This is the first time. To think that "males" from the capital would be involved in such a lesson—"

"…In the first place, this was not in the schedule, right ?"

"There are many people with a somehow cute face. Well, it isn't to the extent of our Prince."

"Or rather, isn't it disgusting? How they stared at us—"

When the female students were embarrassed being fixedly stared at as they were wearing dress gear which tightly fitted to their bodies—

"Hou. As expected, coming here was the right choice."

The man with a stern face standing at the vanguard smiled wryly as he looked at the embarrassed students.

It appeared that this man was the leader among the three.

"The Royal Military Academy for only female students established not long ago. Indeed, it looks like it's dependent on the New Kingdom's permissive system to women and usually does lukewarm training."

"That is because they are still receiving an education curriculum."

Instructor Raigree calmly replied.

Judging from her businesslike tone and expression, the visit of these temporary instructors was not originally scheduled, and even Lux could guess the fact that it was not expected.

But then, what was the reason why these men expressly came for?

"No, no, Raigree-dono. We, adults must teach them the severity of battle as early as possible. No matter how high the Machine Dragon aptitude value's average was judged to be, in the end there is no way that a woman can rival a man, so—"

The muscular man with a rustic impression broadly grinned and said as to pick a fight.

Then, the lean man beside him stepped forward.

"That's right. If you get carried away because of that level of military exercise in the capital — two weeks ago, you'll have difficulty in the future. There is just a handful of strong student Drag-Knights after all. I will also use this opportunity to firmly teach you the severity of a battle."

To the tone of the sticky man, the students' expression stiffened.

"But, I would like you to refrain from dangerous behavior. They are still students after all."

As Instructor Raigree resolutely said so,

"Of course, we will be careful. However — formal training might be somewhat harsh for these weak girls though."

In contrast, the men said so unapologetically.

And, within a strange atmosphere slightly different than usual, the practice began.

Beginning from the Machine Dragon's operation check , they advanced to basic skills practice such as barrier deployment, flight or acceleration and the like, and even extended to shooting by armaments and close range hand-to-hand fighting.

But at this point, it had already become something different from the usual practice.

"Hey, you bastard! With such slow movements, you can't even become a target on the battlefield!? Are you making fun of me? Huh!?"

"What's wrong!? Are you already tired? Do you think you can handle a Machine Dragon with this level?!"

"Don't be naive! Don't ask anyone! Think by yourself and redo it!"

About ten minutes after the start.

The temporary instructors in question were instructing the female students with quite rough methods.

Even Instructor Raigree who watched it attentively looked like she couldn't somehow settle down.

"What the hell does this mean…?"

As Lux, who was taking a break, muttered as he watched the situation from the audience seating—

"It seems that there has also been something like this before."

"Eh—?"

Krulcifer who was behind him before he knew it muttered so calmly.

Both of them were not wearing Machine Dragons now.

Since a Drag-Ride's continuous use had a great burden on the body, they were divided in several groups in the middle of practice and two short breaks were established for each.

"—May I sit next to you?"

"Ah…, yes"

When Lux nodded, Krulcifer quietly sat down beside him.

And, she fixedly stared at the practice field and opened her mouth.

“Those temporary instructors are nobles belonging to the army of the Capital, and it seems that they have wanted to come to this Royal Military Academy since some time now.”

It seemed that Krulcifer, who belonged to the Knight Squadron that was the guerrilla unit of students, had also heard many times about such hidden circumstances.

“But, aren’t there already Instructor Raigree and men instructors in the academy? And yet, why—”

The instructors had already been acknowledged as guides who endorsed the New Kingdom’s ideas.

‘‘And yet, why have they expressly come here?’‘

“To put it plainly, people don’t change so easily.”

With a tone mixed somewhere with resignation, Krulcifer said.

“What do you mean—”

"I'm a foreign student from another country, but I know at least this country's history."

History — in other words, the Old Empire's government system.

She was probably speaking about the trend and system of androcracy.

"They want to shake the predominance of women. They don't like the fact that women step into the area called Drag-Knight which was the men's privilege in this country. It's natural that such people would come over. No, if anything, a person like you may be rare. Former Imperial Prince."

Krulcifer jokingly said, but Lux did not laugh at it.

Since there was such a long history, it was natural that there were "men" like them.

Rather, although they did not take a conspicuous attitude, there were probably many people who were thinking so inwardly.

(I thought I understood at least this much, but—)

"Besides, this incident this time is surely their revenge."

"…? What do you mean?"

"You know about the fact that the third-year students had gone for practice to the Capital last month, right? It seems that during that practice, the academy strongest third-year student, Celis-senpai had completely crushed the faces of the Drag-Knights over there. With her overwhelming strength."

"……"

Celestia Ralgris.

A daughter of a Duke House and the academy strongest girl famous for being a man-hater.

It seemed that she was also ostensibly calm, and she had a personality of not needlessly showing off her strength, but she was looked down upon by the men of the army, and had mercilessly beaten her opponents up in the practice.

Therefore, it was more likely that several men of the army in the Capital that had their pride crushed forcibly

screwed in and carried out this matter of temporary instructors.

"Isn't that— just venting their anger?"

Since they could not hold a candle to Celestia, they used the pretext of instruction to work the other inexperienced female students Drag-Knights hard.

''If that's true—''

"Of course. It's just a rumor, and half is my guess; but such a rumor doesn't seem to be groundless."

Saying so, Krulcifer slowly stood up while turning her gaze to the practice field.

"Break time is over. Shall we go, too?"

"Yes…"

Lux and Krulcifer returned to the practice field side by side.

And they resumed training.

Part 6

"Kyaaaaaaaaah!?"

It happened when Lux and Krulcifer returned to the practice field and was about to begin training.

One female student wearing a Machine Dragon was shot down in the air and struck the ground.

The present training was a mock battle of combat form , a composition of one-on-one between fellow students, but—,

"Hahaha! As expected, it's only this level, huh! You aren't worthy of the glorious reputation of officer cadets. "

A triumphant voice could be heard from the man with a muscular body standing still in mid-air.

Three men came over as temporary instructors.

Under the pretense of "guidance", they forcibly constrained mock battles with students.

Men should basically be inferior to women in Machine Dragon aptitude value, but they utterly defeated the girls by many years of experience and exercise performance.

"I would like you to restrain such dangerous behaviors !"

Raigree glared at the man in mid-air and tried to remonstrate him in a strong tone.

"Raigree-dono, too, will you stop pampering them? We are only teaching them the severity of battle in this way. If the thought of 'they are women, so go easy on them' is rooted, then there will be no future for this country's military force."

But the men's faces, far from reflecting, revealed smiles of mockery.

"Kuh…!"

"U-Um… Sensei. I'm not injured in particular, so—"

The somewhat mature girl, who was just knocked down, got up.

Although she said so, her expression was still depressed.

"Hey, please stop it! What are you temporary instructors doing since some time now?! Launching a surprise attack which we haven't even learnt in class and continuing to pursuit the student who fell down, such a thing— can't be called training!"

As a girl with a serious expression who equipped a < Wyrm> said so and stood in the way,

"Hou, as expected of young ladies who grew up spoiled by the New Kingdom system. You seem to want to say that we should care about you because it's training for battle. Hahahahaha! You're all to stay for supplementary lessons after school today, I will be affectionate with you plenty enough!"

The man with a stern face laughed loudly and the other men also laughed as they followed.

"Then, I will be your opponent!"

"All right. Come."

The female student, who spoke sharply, came slashing with her blade head on. However,

"Haa! It's only that?"

"Eh…!?"

The moment when the <Wyrm>'s blade came slashing, the instructor took distance by skillfully pulling back and aimed at the wrist armor which swung completely.

The blade held by the girl was quickly sent flying and it pierced the ground of the practice field.

"You've not enough training. Young lady."

"P-Please wait a minute! My weapon is—"

When the man was about to swing downward his weapon to the girl who drew back frightened—,

- bashing*! A Drag-Ride's arm parried and topped his hand.

"Ngh…? What is it now?"

Breaking in was Lux wearing his <Wyvern>.

“I’m sorry to interfere with your guidance.”

With a calm expression and tone, he lightly bowed his head first.

“What are you planning, you bastard? In the first place , why is a man here—”

When the man emitted a question, he glared at Lux.

His gaze focused on Lux’s characteristic silver hair and black collar,

“Haa…! I was wondering who it was, but it’s just the Chore Prince of the Old Empire, huh. Why are you in such a place? Were you entrusted with a weeding job?”

He said so as he treated Lux with contempt.

In no way perturbed by this clear insult, Lux returned a calm smile.

“No, due to some circumstances, I commute now here as a student. Setting that aside, could I replace you for instruction? I promised to teach her from now on, so”

"Eh…?"

As Lux told so to the man, the girl with a too serious expression showed a surprised face.

Of course, he did not make such a promise. It was just an excuse he thought of just now.

"What did you say…?"

The man in front of Lux and the other two men turned openly displeased expressions towards Lux.

No, they were glaring at Lux with clear hostility.

Even so, Lux not even daunted, answered with a cool face.

"And — also all the girls present here. I had a prior engagement to teach them how to operate a Drag-Ride after school, so supplementary lessons won't be necessary."

"…!?Don't get carried away, brat. We're the instructors from the army! You lowly criminal and fallen Prince!"

To Lux's indifferent tone, the temporary instructor revealed anger.

The atmosphere of a critical situation drifted and Lux was surrounded by the three men.

"Let's see—. Then, shall we settle it with a fight between you and us?"

The male temporary instructor with a stern face which seemed to be the leader said so.

"You've to show the proof whether you really have enough skill to replace us. If you've any complaint, take back your earlier words—"

"I don't mind."

Lux readily nodded.

The surrounding female students who were watching the course of events became astir.

The male leader knitted his brows as he got angry at Lux's reaction,

"But, we have been fighting continuously, so we're more exhausted than you. Therefore, we will have you attached gyves of weight on your Machine Dragon, but is that still all right with you?"

When Lux nodded at his question, the men smirkingly laughed.

The three men also are people ranked to some extent in the Capital's tournament.

They knew about the fact that Lux was a Drag-Knight good at defense called the "Weakest Undefeated".

But, on top of the peculiarity of battles where he does not attack by himself, if you also put the difference between the number of people and a handicap, they estimated that they would easily defeat him.

Beat up those who oppose as an example and make the female students who watched it surrender.

The aim of the man who was dyed with the Old Empire's ideology was transparent and visible to Lux.

"All right. We will slightly tamper with your Drag-Ride."

"Certainly."

The temporary instructors began to attach parts for weights that were in a corner of the practice field to Lux's <Wyvern>.

Seeing that, Lisha who was on break also ran up.

"Lux, is it all right? If you want, I can fight instead—"

"You'd better stop it. I think that if you who is a princess beat them up, it will be somewhat troublesome––. So this time, let's leave it to me."

"But—"

"It'll be all right. Please, leave it to me."

While Lux replied so, the attachment of parts for weight was over.

"Kukuku. With this, we're even. Then, shall we start the match?"

The men laughed and made the female students who were on the practice field step back to the edges (of the field).

Seeing the situation, the female students raised trembling voices.

"Hey, what is this…? No matter how you look at it, it's unfair!"

"Aren't the weight parts attached almost to the limit!? Such airframe— can't even properly fly with that overweight."

"Even if it's Lux-kun, like that—"

They forcibly attach parts for weights to Lux's < Wyvern> which already had armor with thick weights.

Even someone with little knowledge of Machine Dragon maintenance would judge that it would be impossible to control the overweight.

"It's something that you approved. You'll surely have no complaint, won't you?"

"—I understand"

The three men burst into laughter at Lux's reply.

"You fool" "This guy doesn't seem to understand Machine Dragons" "Well it's fine, we will fully teach him "

And the lean man who drove a <Wyvern> approached Lux.

"Let's see. Then, I will test mobility which is the basics of a Drag-Ride. Of how many times I can sneak behind him within five minutes—"

Though it was common in all fights, taking the opponent's back was a basic tactic.

Especially in a fight between fellow <Wyvern> that mainly assumed air battles, it could be said that how many times one could attack the defenseless back that had weak barrier was the key to victory.

But, Lux on whom, weights were attached to the extent that it could be called overweighed, was already in a situation of certain defeat.

Then, the muscular man using a <Wyrm> folded his arms and looked down at Lux.

"Then, I guess I'll test the evasion technique. Let's test which one of us can fend off more attacks in actual combat."

Finally, the male leader who operated a <Drake> set up a sniper rifle and laughed.

"Then, I will test attacking. It's a match about which one can hit more than the other. Oops, there's probably not much time left for practice, so let's the three of us test him all at once."

Stirring voices leaked from the female students in the audience seating.

"People of the army, I would like you to stop this prank."

Instructor Raigree knitted her brows to the confrontation which could not even be called a decent match, but the men ignored her and turned to Lux.

"Hey, if you grovel on the ground now and apologize, I don't mind stopping. Ingratiating yourself to people is your specialty, isn't it? Dear Prince."

"If you've already decided the match format, can we begin?"

"What?"

To Lux's calm words, the lean man revealed an uncanny look.

"Hahaha. Don't pretend to be tough and show off. The current you can't even take off from the ground—"

When the lean man showered scornful laughter, the back wings of Lux's <Wyvern> shone.

It released wind from the jet hole and rose from the ground.

Small cheers leaked out from the female students in the audience seating.

"W-What…?"

The lean man's eyes were opened wide in shock.

Originally, it should be enough weight to not be able to decently move let alone fly, but Lux calmly performed it.

"Please, give the signal. Instructor."

"…Is it all right?"

Instructor Raigree asked with a dubious face.

But, seeing Lux nod without hesitation, she sent a signal to the official in charge in the audience seating.

"Mock battle, start!"

Shortly after, the signal of the battle starting was given .

A moment later, the three temporary instructors began to move.

"Haa…! You fool!"

Chasing Lux who flew in a somewhat low altitude, the lean man also flew.

Exactly as his words said “mobility test”, he came aiming at Lux’s back.

Regardless of the fact that they both used <Wyvern>, there is a big difference in speed due to the gives of weight (handicap).

“Ha, what’s wrong? What’s wrong?! Were you energetic only at the beginning?!”

Although Lux was able to fly, as expected the man, who stuck on the back of Lux who could not gather speed, raised his voice and laughed.

Far from turning around and taking his opponent’s back, it looked like running away by flying straight was the best Lux could do.

The lean man who saw that became more arrogant.

“Fall down unsightly! You fallen Prince!”

The moment when the man who pressed hard on Lux’ s back was about to slash with his blade—

“Wha!?”

The <Wyvern> of Lux who had his back turned made a somersault and arrived exactly at the back of the man flying straight on.

As a result, before he knew it the man found himself before the wall surrounding the practice field.

Thus — in order to avoid a crash, he could not help but suddenly stop (he was compelled to a sudden stop).

"Gah!?"

Without overlooking his defenseless back, Lux's lightning slash knocked him down.

The lean man, still wearing his <Wyvern>, violently crashed onto the ground and the wall.

"____"

At the dust which rose up, and the sound, the audience seating of the practice field fell silent.

"That is... no way."

When Lisha was amazed, Krulcifer beside her also nodded.

"Yes, if you can't generate enough speed to sneak behind your opponent, you should just let him stick closely on your back and then sneak behind him with a somersault. He seems to have been aiming for this since the beginning."

It was easy to explain like this, but pulling it off was an extremely difficult task.

The students with the ability level to know that were speechless, and the other students raised shouts of joy.

"Hmm. As expected, my eyes weren't wrong. All right , I shall make him join the "Knight Squadron" as soon as possible, a-and as for that other request—"

"That's good and all, but right now, he's my lover."

"Ngh…!"

When Krulcifer and Lisha mutually clashed with their gazes,

"Don't get carried away! You brat!"

The muscular man wearing the <Wyrm> raised an angry voice and set up his cannon.

Due to the load of weight parts, the mobility of Lux's < Wyvern> was extremely reduced.

Furthermore, since flight took up energy, he should not be able to fully stretch a barrier.

By focusing all the energy in a single blow of the main armament, he could certainly make Lux unable to continue fighting.

The man who planned so fired the cannon aiming at Lux.

"...!"

But, Lux deflected the main armament's shooting from point-blank range with the point of his blade clad in energy, and evaded it.

The man changed his aim and continued shooting a second, and then a third time, but the result was exactly the same.

"W-Why?! How can you apply your sword so accurately and deflect the attacks?"

"It's because your aiming was relatively simple."

As Lux answered indifferently, the muscular man became speechless.

"It's basic to aim for the center of a Machine Dragon if you only think about blowing away your opponent, and it seems that you've also been doing so all the time even in the tournament of the Capital, but—. Thanks to that, I was able to minimize the barrier and use energy in the blade."

"Wha…!?"

While the muscular man was flustered, the male leader wearing the <Drake> ground his teeth with his sniper rifle still set up.

He was 300 Mel away from one edge of the practice field where Lux fought.

From that safety zone where he could never receive the opponent's counterattack, he intended to one-sidedly snipe at Lux whose attention was attracted by his two comrades, but—,

"What the hell is happening—?"

In a state of overweight where it was originally impossible to operate, Lux had conducted himself more than equally against three machines of the Capital's army as opponents.

The <Wyvern> of the lean man was flown by Lux as his back was taken by Lux, and the <Wyrm>'s cannon was altogether flipped by Lux's blade, too.

And, although he aimed at Lux with his sniper rifle, his attacks were all evaded by movements which, while in low speed, did not let him focus his aim; and not even one of his attacks hit.

To that too much unreal spectacle, he felt irritation and shiver.

The men intended to torment (bully) Lux who defied them.

"But — like this, it's as if…!"

The Drag-Knights of the army, even though there were three, were led around by the nose by the officer cadet Lux who bore a tremendous handicap.

"Aren't we the ones who have been humiliated…?!"

That humiliation caused the man to make a certain choice (option).

Part 7

"Gee, it's fascinating as usual, eh. Lux-cchi's movements—"

Tillfarr of the Triad, who was the person in charge of deploying a barrier before the audience seating muttered so while watching the fight.

While the other female students raised cheers, Tillfarr, Lux's classmate who was also a member of the guerrilla unit, "Knight Squadron", was analyzing the progress of the battle relatively calmly.

"Why was Lux-cchi able to take the back of the opponent's <Wyvern> so easily? Even though his speed should have been far inferior due to the overweight—"

"It is because his flying method (technique) is quite special."

To Tillfarr's mutter, Krulcifer who was directly behind her in the audience seating answered so.

"Eh? …What do you mean by that?"

"Normally, when one wants to sneak behind his opponent in a battle between fellow flying type Machine Dragons, he has to stick on the opponent's back by adjusting up and down the propulsion output. However in Lux's case, he pursuits the enemy by skillfully interlacing ascent and descent while adjusting the distance after having predicted his opponent's flight trajectory."

If he took a rising trajectory while advancing, he would become temporarily slower than his opponent; and then by descending while being subjected to the influence of the gravity, he could approach the opponents more quickly.

"As such, it's a quite advanced technique, but you can' t help but say that pulling it off in that overweight state is nothing short of a miracle."

"At this rate, Lux's victory is determined. That evil trio . It's your reward for having underestimated my favorite (loved one?)."

As she was pleased with this situation, Lisha contentedly folded her arms.

"It's amazing, Lux-kun."

"He is much stronger than the Drag-Knights of the army!"

The female students' voices began to leak so, and the outcome was certainly determined.

But—,

"No. I am afraid there is still one concern."

Krulcifer stared at the practice field with calm eyes and drew out the Sword Device from the sheath at her waist.

It was not her personal Divine Drag-Ride <Fafnir>'s, but a <Wyvern>'s for practice.

"Hey? What do you intend to do?"

To the question of Lisha who looked puzzled, Krulcifer answered with her usual smile.

"A little help. To my — lover, that is."

Part 8

Only several minutes since the start of the mock battle.

One of the three temporary instructors, the <Drake> with the attack role could not catch the <Wyvern> of Lux who was flying skillfully.

But, covering his two comrades which were exhausted, the male leader made a certain resolution.

『Your getting carried away ends here. Fool!

"…!"

When Lux noticed it, the man said.

He spoke narrowing down the dragon voice which was the communication function between fellow Machine Dragons only to Lux.

『Do you understand? Don't dodge it.

With a smile filled with dark emotions, the man said so.

"…?"

While cocking his head in puzzlement, Lux set up his sword in mid-air and braced himself.

At that moment—,

- paaaang*!

"Kyaaaaaah!"

The atmosphere of the practice field burst, and the light bullets shot by the sniper rifle reached the audience seating behind Lux.

"Uah…!"

The student who was in charge of widely stretching the barrier in the audience seating — Tillfarr, one of the Triad, received a direct hit and lost her balance.

The female students of the audience seating that were relieved at Lux's odds held their breath in tension.

"Oops, sorry. It doesn't hit you easily, so I anticipated your next movement; but I ended up missing."

Unlike until a while ago when Lux was moving continuously, he was now static in mid-air.

There was no way that a Drag-Knight of army would miss in these 300 Mel which was the distance of the rifle's range.

(He aimed not at me, but at everyone behind me—)

『When I said not to dodge, it also includes not to defend yourself. The next time, we'll attack you with the three of us. If you try to dodge again—

The male leader grinned, and at the same time, his two comrades who were heavily breathing also set up their cannons. The three men wanted to defeat Lux by shooting simultaneously at one point.

If he were to either dodge or defend against it, they would probably intend on crashing their simultaneous attacks on the female students of the audience seating behind him.

If the student in charge of the barrier was to receive the three men's simultaneous attacks, she wouldn't be able to defend against them.

"I understand."

With a tone of resignation, Lux, still floating, undid his stance.

And when he was about to prepare himself, *pang*!, the air burst.

"Wha!?"

"Eh—?"

Krulcifer wearing a <Wyvern> went down to the stage of the practice field. As she fired only one shot towards the blue sky, she set up her rifle again and fearlessly laughed.

At the same time, the bell rang and the mock battle ended.

"It's a shame — but it looks like it's time-out. The match is over."

"D-Don't joke with us!?"

The men who were thinking that they were about to defeat Lux unanimously raised flustered voices.

"A little more and it would have been our victory! Letting it end like this without settling it is—"

"Is that so? In that case, what about having a match with me next?"

"Wha…!?"

The men were flustered at the sudden challenge from the girl.

"It's clear that you weren't able to knock him down, but it isn't like I don't understand your feelings of wanting to settle it by all means. Therefore, I will be your opponent. This time — let's do a battle of sniping at each other."

"Y-You little girl—!?"

"A match of only a minute, the condition will remain a three-to-one fight. If you're fine with that, then let's begin ."

To the smile of Krulcifer as if seeing through all, the temporary instructors revealed irritation.

It would have gotten nowhere if they continued being led around by the nose by Lux like this.

As each of them held their weapons, they rushed onto Krulcifer.

"Krulcifer-san!"

Lux called out to her in panic, but Krulcifer returned only a smile, quickly set up the rifle in her hand and shot.

"Ough…!?"

"What…!"

A dreadful quick shot, whose alignment is determined almost instantly in one stroke, in addition, regardless of firing in three directions, the abnormal speed and

precision sent the armaments in the opponents' hands flying.

Moreover, when she shot the confused opponents' feet and broke their stance, she shot at the Force Core from the slight opening in the barrier.

Being accurately struck on the weak point, the three men's Machine Dragons stopped their function.

"N-No way… Impossible!?"

Although the opponents were also caught off guard, the men of the army were at a loss for words at that skill which sniped at the three moving Machine Dragons in a flash from a position at the very limit of the range.

"It looks like you also have no qualifications to teach attack techniques. With that said, should they be in such a place? Sensei."

"Yes, you're right. This match is Lux Acadia's victory."

At the same time as Instructor Raigree gave the judgment, the audience seating was wrapped in cheers.

"And one more thing—, you temporary instructors will let me hear about your story later. It's a big problem for soldiers of the New Kingdom to purposely aim at students in the audience seating. You have no qualifications to act as instructors."

"Guh…!"

The three temporary instructors who were beaten left the practice field while grinding their teeth.

With this—, they would not get close to the academy for a while.

As Lux who heaved a sigh of relief got down to the ground, Instructor Raigree who drove out the temporary instructors came before him.

"Lux Acadia. I shall express my thanks this time, but do not act rashly all by yourself."

In a calm tone with no anger, Instructor Raigree said.

"Yes."

As Lux cancelled his armor while answering, he approached Krulcifer.

"Was it unnecessary help?"

"No…, you've been a big help."

To the words of Krulcifer who revealed a smile, Lux returned so.

"You have predicted up to the fact that they would aim at the girls in the audience seating after all. If Krulcifer-san hasn't been there—"

"At that time — you would have stood out more and more."

As though she saw through it all, Krulcifer muttered.

"Don't worry about it. Half of the reason was because I want you to know my ability, so I only poke my noise into this."

"Then, what about the other half—?"

"Because I didn't want you to be stolen by everyone — what if I said that?"

Saying so, Krulcifer turned a meaningful look sideways.

There, their classmates who had been watching the mock battle until now were closing in.

"You did it! I feel good thanks to you! Lux-kun."

"Hey, hey. Like you said a while ago, you'll teach us after school, right? Sensei."

"That's right. By all means, I would like you to properly instruct us."

Lux was surrounded by the girls released from the violent temporary instructors, who had smiles of relief and joy.

"E-Errr… Um, saying that I will teach was a figure of speech, um—"

Of course, it was an excuse to resist the temporary instructors.

The girls should also understand that, but still they wanted to say so.

Thus, as Lux was troubled as to what to do—,

“I’m sorry. But, I already have a plan with him today. It’s me who has won the contest, so I will have you let me speak out my selfishness this time.”

As Krulcifer said so, she entwined her arm to Lux’s.

“Wait, Krulcifer-san!?”

The swelling of the girl’s chest lightly touching him, Lux panicked.

It was softer than expected even from the dress gear.

“Kyaaaaah”, his classmates who saw that raised their voices further.

“……”

At the audience seating of the practice field drifted the “case is closed” atmosphere.

Lisha, still wearing the Divine Drag-Ride <Tiamat> was gazing at Krulcifer and company on the practice field.

"I-I was completely late…"

Lisha also moved a moment later than Krulcifer, but she saw through the fact that the student in charge of stretching the barrier was likely to be attacked and summoned <Tiamat>, but…

"It's strange… even though I was supposed to help Lux at this place—"

It had been settled in no time with Lisha not forcing her way through.

Tillfarr who was beside her smiled wryly as she saw Lisha's whole body tremble.

"W…Well, it can't be helped. Lisha-sama has also saved everyone properly, so I'm grateful to you."

Patting the armor which Lisha wore, Tillfarr gave words of thanks.

"It's bad, it's bad… At this rate, my partner will be—"

While grumblingly muttering, Lisha cancelled her connection and stood on the practice field.

"Hey, Tillfarr. You said that you were grateful to me, right?"

"Eh…!? Well, kind of…"

"Then, let's begin a strategy meeting! Let's think of a way to take back my partner!"

As Lisha declared so, she found Philphie who was standing nearby and approached her.

"I will also have you cooperate, airhead girl. There are a lot of things I want to ask you about Lux."

"I don't mind."

Philphie seemed not that much interested, but did she think of something (but then she thought of something), she agreed by nodding.

"Then, we will begin today after school. You will gather at my atelier."

Lisha decided so and ended the talk.

“I don’t really think that Lu-chan has forgotten. About the two of us.”

On the side, Philphie muttered in a subdued voice.

Part 9

“Phew, I’m tired today, too…”

The night of that day too, after finishing odd jobs such as the arrangement of bookshelves in the library, the care of the yard as well as the girl's dormitory bath cleaning, Lux was heading to the dining room.

The request of being Krulcifer’s “lover” for one week was given priority, but he felt awkward to completely decline other odd jobs, so in the end, he ended up working.

The debt which Lux and Airi who were the survivors of the Old Empire were burdened with in exchange for release on parole could hardly be paid by one person, but they must return it even if little by little.

"But like this, the rest is only my personal business…"

When he arrived at the dining room where there was no one, he spread the several sheets of papers and textbooks in his hands and began to study, but…

"N-Ngh…"

Probably because of the fatigue of odd jobs, his eyelids immediately got heavy.

His eyes were closed when he noticed.

……

"Uuh…"

Lux woke up to the fragrance of vivid black tea.

Before him, there were a porcelain teapot with a flower pattern and a beautiful girl in uniform.

"Did you wake up? You will catch a cold if you are sleeping in such a place."

"Yes… Wait, Krulcifer!? Why are you here—?"

Lux confusedly turned his gaze at the surroundings.

When he looked at the big clock of the dining room, he seemed to have dozed for about just ten minutes.

"Oh my? I am your lover. It won't be strange even if I'm staring at your cute sleeping face, right?"

"I-I don't mean that—"

As Lux was flustered with a red face, Krulcifer poured black tea into a teacup.

And she held out the cup to Lux with her usual cool smile.

"I called the manager and I had him give me an exception to use the fire."

"T-Thank you…"

As he drank the tea, a nice fragrance came into his nose, and a faint bitterness got rid of his sleepiness.

A little vitality returned to his exhausted body.

"It's just by coincidence that I found you. I had wanted at least something to talk about with you when we meet though.

"Ah, is that so?"

"More importantly, what are you also doing in such a place? I don't intend to interfere with your odd jobs, but I think that homework should be done by the person himself."

To the words of Krulcifer which he did not know whether she was joking or serious, Lux smiled wryly and answered.

"No, this is my personal self-study. Um — I'm still behind everyone on most subjects, so…"

In his tender age, Lux was taught basic manners and study from an educational staff.

But, being expelled from the Imperial Court and moreover in the five years of life doing odd jobs after the coup d'état, if anything, there were many practical things which he learnt and he had not that many opportunities to touch (experience) study.

Here, there were not only matters related to Machine Dragons, but also classes of education and study in order to become a military officer or civil official, so he thought that he wanted to study properly.

When Lux talk about it to Krulcifer,

"I see… Then, shall we study together for only 30 minutes from now? Since it will be inefficient with a tired head even if you overdo it, let's concentrate just a little."

She calmly said and sat opposite to Lux.

"I roughly know the parts you aren't very good at. So, you should catch up by simply memorizing little by little the subjects where you can pack knowledge in your spare moments. For now, let's focus on the premise parts in order to make it easier to understand the lesson."

"Perhaps — will you teach me?"

"Are you dissatisfied with me? I may look like this, but if it is only the results of tests, I'm the top of the second-year students."

To Krulcifer who smiled proudly, Lux hurriedly shook his head.

(Or rather, even though Krulcifer-san is a foreign student, to think she is the top of the second-year…)

While being dumbfounded at her excellence, he continued to study through Krulcifer's guidance.

She splendidly resolved the places such arithmetic, geometry, and alchemy which Lux had trouble with and helped him understand them.

When the tea filling the pot was almost emptied and they took a short break,

"With this, has it started to sink in somewhat? It seems that you are unexpectedly catching on (up) quickly, so if I teach you several times again, I think that there won't be any place where you will have troubles at the lectures. "

"…Ah, yes. Thank you for today Krulcifer-san!"

As Lux turned a smile of relief and thanked her,

"This much is not a big deal."

Was she embarrassed, she slightly averted her eyes from Lux and answered so.

"No, that's not right. Even in the fight at the time of today's practice, you came to help me—"

He saw through the ability of the men of the army, but the last threat was a miscalculation.

''Without Krulcifer's quick wit, I would've had to take a risk.''

When Lux once again thanked her as he thought so,

"About that, there is no need for you to thank me."

Krulcifer plainly said with a serious look.

"I am a calculating woman. That is something I did for me. If you were to injure yourself and fall down, it would have impeded that "lover role", right? So — you shouldn 't mind it."

"But—"

"More importantly why did you do such a thing, too?"

"Eh…?"

To Krulcifer's sudden question, Lux cocked his head in puzzlement.

"You went to save the involved (bullied) girl in the practice field. As a result, after that, the party of the third-year students, those students who advocated the question of your admission, who heard the story seemed to have revoked their complaint which they were going to say to the Principal. But, it's not as if you did something like that by such a calculation, right?"

"Well, I guess—"

Lux was at a loss on how he should answer.

Frankly speaking, there was not a deep reason this time.

He had just done it reflexively.

But, if there was something which could describe such a behavioral principle of Lux—

"……"

Past memories were revived in Lux's mind.

When he hesitated for an instant to speak of it,

"Oh? What are you doing at such a time, Lux?"

With a surprised voice, three girls appeared in the dining room.

"Huh? Everyone—"

There were Lisha, Philphie and Tillfarr of the Triad.

They were classmates, so it was not strange; but Lux thought that it was an unexpected combination.

Regarding Philphie, she was dozing off while holding a pillow under her arms; it clearly brought the feeling that she was forcibly brought along.

"To be together like this until this late hour. Not bad, you two."

When Tillfarr said so with a mischievous smile, Lisha beside her reacted twitchily.

As she silently went before Krulcifer, she called out to her with an impatient expression.

"Hey Krulcifer. Just because you became Lux's, um — l-lover by your request, don't do strange things as you pleases."

"Oh my? Strange things? Hardly. As you see, we were just studying peacefully."

Krulcifer entwined her arm on Lux's while lightly eluding.

"Wai-, Krulcifer-san!?"

To the nice fragrance which softly drifted and the softness of her body which could be felt even over her uniform, Lux's heart unintentionally throbbed.

Lisha who saw that was further upset with teary eyes.

"W-What are you doing right after what you said!? Go away! We're within the academy here!"

"I see; it can't be helped."

Unexpectedly, Krulcifer obediently parted from Lux.

(Honestly, even I can't endure it, but…!)

It was certainly for the acting to the bitter end, but the stimulation was too strong for Lux.

"With that said, it's already late, so let's call it a day! Lead a regulate life."

"I understand. See you tomorrow. Lux-kun."

When Krulcifer was about to leave so, Lisha raised her voice.

"Krulcifer, I'll tell you just in case. But I've already linked arms with Lux on a date. So don't think you can easily exceed that lead!"

"……"

At that proud declaration, the members who were present there stiffened silently.

"Fufu. It looks like you've lost your voice. But, it can't be helped. After all, the relation between Lux and I has already advanced till there."

To Lisha who crossed her arms and proudly nodded, Krulcifer whispered into Tillfarr's ear.

"I'm not that knowledgeable about the view of love in this country, but is linking arms such a great thing?"

"No, Lisha-sama probably don't know about these things at all—"

"…Um, Lisha-sama"

Lux who became anxious asked to Lisha's side just in case.

"Errr, do you know what a kiss is?"

"Wha!? D-Don't make a fool of me!? Of course, I know it! U-Um — it's something you have to do when you get married… It's something necessary when making children in the future…"

"……"

To Lisha who blushed and hesitated, all the remained people became silent.

"Why did you leave things be until it became like this …?

"W-Well, Lisha-sama was only interested in Drag-Rides, so…"

While Krulcifer and Tillfarr whispered at each other with expressions showing that they did not know what to say,

"I have kissed with Lu-chan long ago, though—"

"Hey, Phi-chan! Don't say that now—!"

Hurriedly holding the mouth of Philphie who muttered in a subdued voice, Lux who also got tired returned to the room.

It seemed that they would be more ups and downs during his lover life with Krulcifer.

Episode 2 – A Messenger of Ymir

Part 1

Three days had already passed since Lux became Krulcifer's "lover".

In order to handle the "lover role" requested by her, they continued life that looked like it[4] as they did practice together or as a pair as much as possible and had their lunch together in the dining room.

Thanks to that the initial awkwardness somehow disappeared, but.

"Still, I'm envious of Krulcifer-san."

"But, it's her who won the contest, so there's no helping it."

"Yes. It's frustrating, but they look good together. Be it appearance or ability—"

One day after school when such voices had begun to be whispered among the female classmates.

"Today after this, I want you to go on a date with me."

With her usual cool smile, Krulcifer said so.

And it was still in the classroom in which many classmates were still present as the lesson had just ended.

“D-Date!? Or rather, why are you expressly saying it here!?”

“……”

Being turned a cramped smile by Lisha at a corner of the classroom, Lux confusedly protested.

But, Krulcifer calmly acted flirtatiously and bent her head slightly to one side.

“It just occurred to me, so I said it — was it bothersome?”

“I-It wasn’t, but…”

“I see, thank you. I’m glad.”

(N-No good — I was completely sucked by her pace)

“Kuh, endure it, endure it…”

They came out to the corridor leaving Lisha who grumblingly muttering so in the classroom.

Then, at the moment when there weren't any signs of other students, Lux began to speak.

"Um, that declaration just now, perhaps was it on purpose?"

"Of course. If we don't properly make everyone think that it's the "real thing", the messenger of the Einvolk House that will come soon will find it suspicious that it's a fake."

"……"

To Krulcifer who smoothly declared, Lux could not say anything.

"But… Even if you don't go so far—"

Even if it's said that a messenger will come from the Einvolk House, would he go as far as to doubt Krulcifer's words and try to collect evidence?

"You will understand those circumstances right away. The date itself is true, so we shall prepare a little."

While curtly answering Lux's question, Krulcifer said so in front of the dormitory.

After returning to his room and preparing his outfit, he met with her in front of the school gate ten minutes later.

"First, let's go buy clothes."

They left the school premises and walked down the main street of the first block.

Ahead of them after walking for about 30 minutes, was the commercial area for relatively affluent customers even among the Fort Cities.

The noticeable establishments were upper class-oriented high-class hotels, restaurants, tailor's shops, monasteries and free medical institutions.

Stately mansions built on a large site were standing in a row in a place where Lux had not come by that much for odd jobs.

The Fort City was also an important base for investigating the ruins.

There were many Drag-Knights nobles living in this city, and there were also a lot of examples of even people living in the Capital having built a secondary residence here.

Even now when the system changed after the outbreak of the coup d'état five years ago, such things remained unchanged.

But—,

"It's really interesting."

Krulcifer walking beside him suddenly muttered.

"Eh…?"

"It's not that rare a cityscape, right? For you, a former Prince."

She seemed to have said it as she saw Lux looking curiously around.

"Do you often come to such places, Krulcifer-san?"

"I rarely come."

Krulcifer's reply was plain.

"I see. I think that someone like Krulcifer-san is more suited for the atmosphere of such a refined town more than me—"

As Lux looked at her profile while saying such a thing,

"That isn't the case. After all — I hate it."

"Eh…?"

Still looking forward, Krulcifer said clearly.

"I don't like people such as aristocrats."

"……"

After that, the conversation stopped for a while.

(What the hell does she mean by that…?)

Krulcifer was a daughter of an Earl of Ymir.

The reason why she, who was from a prestigious family, hated the same aristocrats.

I don't think it's for something as simple as antipathy to political marriages of convenience.

"—Over here."

When Lux thought about such a thing, Krulcifer suddenly stopped.

There was a big tailor shop decorated with a beautiful signboard and carvings there.

"It's a shop which seems to be quite expensive."

"Really? I thought that you, former royalty, was used to such things though."

When Krulcifer said so with a smile, Lux smiled wryly.

"Having dressed in nice clothes in the Imperial Court is a thing of the past. I don't remember it any longer."

"Then, it doesn't seem to be so enjoyable for you, huh. Then, let's finish this as soon as possible."

Saying so, Krulcifer entered the shop first.

Lux followed after her.

"……"

After measured his body size and choosing clothes, they had the tailor fix those according to his size.

And, one hour later.

"…Wait, was the shopping for my clothes!?"

In the cityscape wrapped in dusk, Lux who came out of the shop unintentionally cried.

"Rest assured. As far as you trying them on, you looked quite good in formal clothes. As expected of a former Prince."

Krulcifer returned so with a smile as if it was somebody else's problem.

"Whether you like it or not—, I can't accept such expensive stuff!"

Lux, who was bought formal clothes and shoes by Krulcifer, hurriedly declined.

They settled with the tailor that the clothes would be completed after three days, but the fees seemed to have been paid in advance.

"You do not need to mind it. It's in the range of funds that I can use freely. It's also not a great amount."

"……"

Lux had just brought clothes worth the amount of money that he would've spent in three months during the time he was doing odd jobs, so he once gain realized that she was after all an Ojou-sama[5].

No, it might simply be that he did not just seem like a former Prince, but—

"We take the trouble to come to town, so shall we have a meal and then go back? I will pay."

They left the high-class commercial area and came out to a large street.

Probably because of the time period when it was growing dark, there was nobody in the neighborhood and it was dusky.

"U-Um — as expected, even I can pay…"

No matter how often he was made to go along with only Krulcifer's plans, Lux also had his pride.

"I kind of like such manly sides on a boy. Though you usually have a face like a girl—"

"T-That has nothing to do with it, right!?"

It had been a long time since he had his appearance spoken about, so Lux's face turned red.

At that time when the tension somewhat loosened—,

"…!? Watch out!"

At the same time as he shouted, Lux jumped towards Krulcifer and hugged her.

Immediately after, something like a whip extended at high speed and wound the empty space.

In other words, the space on the street where Krulcifer was standing until just a while ago.

A passage slightly away from the upper class area.

Lux was familiar with that weapon which extended from the shade of a vacant house.

"A wire tail…! A Drag-Knight, huh!?"

He promptly drew out his <Wyvern>'s Sword Device from his waist.

"Don't move! If you move, I'll shoot!"

But, almost at the same time, five Drag-Rides which appeared from the surroundings had set up Breath Guns towards Lux and Krulcifer.

The five people operating the Machine Dragons were men who wounded their heads with a cloth.

Their unfamiliar rustic impression totally harked back to thieves.

"There are five <Drakes>, huh. We were careless…"

Krulcifer seeing that raised both her hands as to surrender.

Lux also reluctantly followed it and put his sword at his feet.

"Remain like that. Don't call any Machine Dragons. In any case, you can't escape anymore."

The <Drake> — these Machine Dragons called customized general-purpose Machine Dragons, unlike the other two kinds, had unique abilities.

One of them was the power of "camouflage" they had used just now.

It erases the drive sound and light, and conceals itself by lightly projecting the scenery of the surroundings.

Therefore, they were able to nudge at Lux and Krulcifer's opening and take the first move in downtown.

"Well then, we'll tie you, so can you stay quiet? It'll be uncomfortable, but I will have you endure it."

The man at the vanguard said so within the darkness.

Is their purpose kidnapping?

They're probably bandits aiming for Krulcifer, a daughter of an Earl.

As Lux who guessed so quietly took a deep breath,

"You'd better stop it."

He spoke like so towards the men.

"What…?"

To Lux's attitude which, far from begging for his life, showed no signs of being perturbed, the male thief uttered a dubious voice.

"Yes, you're right, you'd better stop it. If you don't want to be hurt, that is."

Similarly, Krulcifer beside him also muttered as to follow.

"Fuhahahaha! This is why the aristocrat people are… You don't seem to understand reality. Well it's fine; you guys, catch them quickly— gugah!?"

The man in the vanguard who began speaking suddenly fell, leaning forward with his Machine Dragon and groaned.

"…Wha!?"

When the other Drag-Knights squared off, Lux led Krulcifer by the hand and began to run.

“W-Wait!?”

The remaining four <Drakes> who saw that moved in a hurry.

When they were going to chase the two people so that they won’t escape into a narrow passage,

“Errr. Will you stop?”

A huge purple Drag-Ride stood in between Lux and the men.

“What…!?”

Divine Drag-Ride <Typhon>.

It was a ground-type Drag-Ride specialized in close range combat that, although both arms weren’t equipped with weapons, overwhelmed the enemy in hand-to-hand combat with claws and fists.

“Good evening. Lu-chan”

His childhood friend who was the user of that Machine Dragon called out like so to Lux.

"Philphie… You came after all."

As Lux smiled wryly and replied to it,

"Hey Lux! I'm also here, you know!? Look here, too!"

Lisha wearing the <Chimeric Wyvern> had already knocked down one Drag-Knight.

"Lisha-sama!"

"Why are you two in such a place?"

"N-No… Um, isn't it just a coincidence? It isn't really like we were concerned about the relation between you two and followed you or something like that…"

"Ah, I see…"

As Lux turned an indescribable face to Lisha who averted her eyes and blushed, the three Machine Dragons driven by the remaining men Machine Dragon moved simultaneously.

"There are only two enemies! Beat them and kidnap them!"

The <Drakes> respectively set up their small-sized blades and attacked <Typhon>.

But,

"Eeih."

Contrary to the leisurely voice, a quick fist was let out by <Typhon>.

A strong arm probably twice as big as a common Drag-Ride's.

The <Drake>'s right arm which was holding the blade that was hit with that fist was pulverized with one blow.

"W-Whaaaat…!?"

In front of the man who opened his eyes wide in surprise, <Typhon> made a somersault.

The Drag-Ride, a weapon built up with metal frame, accelerated with swift movement like a wild beast.

And, a kick of the Machine Dragon pierced through the body (of the Drake) which became defenseless as the arms were destroyed.

"Ga…aah!?"

The bandit was sent flying dozen of Mel behind and fainted in agony.

The barrier which was deployed at maximum output was also smashed and the Machine Dragon's connection was immediately cancelled.

"Uwah…!?"

Lux seeing that strange combat style could not help but cry out.

"Is it your first time? Watching directly how she fights with her <Typhon>."

Krulcifer who escaped into the shade of an alley with Lux asked so.

"Philphie. So you can do such things…"

Taijutsu attacks using a Drag-Ride.

Then, she caught the blade of another <Drake> with the palm of her Machine's hand this time and crushed it in an instant. She launched a punch with the other arm almost simultaneously and smashed the armor with one blow.

Philphie who had learned martial arts seemed to be good at close combat.

That human bullet attack which made use of the weight and output had the destructive power to easily defeat a general-purpose Machine Dragon even with defense.

Such a flexible and quick carriage (movement) which made it hardly thinkable that she was wearing armor.

Lux had never seen a Drag-Knight use a roundhouse kick from martial arts.

"I-Is she a monster, this girl…!?"

The fifth bandit, whose comrades were defeated in an instant, started escaping using his <Drake>.

When the man turned his back as he escaped to the alley where it would be hard to chase him with <Typhon >'s big frame,

"<Pile Anchor>"

At the same that Philphie muttered, a thick dark gray wire was shot from the armor (shell) of <Typhon>'s both arms.

"Wha!?"

As the metal, which is at the tip of the wire that came flying bit at the opened <Drake> like the jaw of a big snake, the man was pulled back at high speed before Philphie.

"That's—!?"

"It's <Typhon>'s special armament. At first glance, it's a weapon of the capture system like the wire tail, but it seems that it can be emitted from various parts of the armor and can capture an enemy within range."

At the same time that the <Pile Anchor>, which was shot from the left arm and caught the enemy, pulled him back at high speed, <Typhon> raised its right arm.

When the forceful counterattack, that was released while drawing in the opponent, was about to burst in front of his eyes,

"H-Help—!?"

"I went a little far … I guess?"

- poof*, Philphie cancelled the <Pile Anchor>'s restraint and released the <Drake>.

But, the <Drake> which had been pulled back at high speed toppled sideways by the force of inertia and crashed into the wall. —It stopped moving.

"Hey, airhead girl. Don't let your guard down!"

Lisha shouted while restraining the Drag-Knights whose armor was destroyed using the <Chimeric Wyvern>.

"…Huh?"

The moment when Philphie turned her gaze at the Drag-Knight that she had beaten, the man wasn't in the < Drake>.

When she looked around, the man could be seen running down a back alley as he cancelled the connection .

Escaping after casting aside his Machine Dragon — no.

Ahead of where the man was running away, a slender woman was standing.

"D-Don't move! The woman there—!"

Pulling a knife from his waist, the bandit shouted.

He probably wanted to hold her hostage.

"Watch out!"

Lux unintentionally cried out, and was about to run to help her, but—

"There is no need to go help her."

He was quietly restrained by Krulcifer with a serious look.

"Eh…?"

Meanwhile, when the bandit approached the woman and was going to thrust the knife at her chest,

"It's really bad, eh. This country's public order (security)—"

- kin*!

Soon after the woman calmly muttered, the bandit's knife flew in midair.

"Wha…!?"

"Please do not move. Otherwise, my hand will slip."

The bandit who fell on his backside on the spot had the tip of a long sword thrust at his throat.

Countless silver lines were running on the surface of the long sword held by the woman.

"A Sword Device…!? That person, who on earth—"

At the same time Lux that muttered, the woman with a cool-headed expression calmly raised her face.

"Long time no see. Miss"

"Eh…?"

Next to the confused Lux, Krulcifer sighed.

"She is an acquaintance of mine. The butler of the Einvolk House, Alterize McClair."

"Then, perhaps she is—?"

"Yes, she is the Einvolk House's attendant who came to see how I do."

"May we change the place? This place is inappropriate to have a talk."

The woman called Alterize calmly suggested so.

"……"

After handing over the bandits to the guard soldiers who arrived late, Lux and company followed after Alterize.

Part 2

About ten minutes after they walked away from the scene.

They decide to gather in a bar a little near the academy site and to have a light talk.

Although access to bars was not allowed in school regulations, Alterize said that she would take responsibility.

Lux, Krulcifer and Alterize sat on a table for three people, and Lisha and Philphie sat on the table immediately nearby.

The latter two should originally have nothing to do with the matter, but they ended up coming together along due to the course of events.

“First of all, well. It is good above all to see you in good health, Miss. Is what I would like to say, but—”

Alterize glancing at Lux and the others, began to talk so.

The Einvolk House, a noble House of the religious country Ymir and a prestigious family which produced Drag-Knights in large number.

It seemed that she, who served as a butler, was herself an excellent Drag-Knight, and one of the strongest people called Ex-class in the country Ymir.

“There is no need for unnecessary concern just because we are in front of my classmates.”

As Krulcifer curtly said so, Alterize leaked a sigh.

"Well then, straight to the point. Please be a little more careful. Your body belongs to the Einvolk House."

"Then, being targeted by thieves is also the fate of a prestigious family, so it can't be helped."

"……"

In a tone mixed with sarcasm, Krulcifer returned like so to Alterize's words which were somewhat disagreeable.

Lisha, who saw it, muttered "What is it? Are they on bad terms?" at the table nearby.

(But certainly, I feel like it's a little different from a normal master-servant relation…)

Lux who was watching it also had the same impression.

Be it good or bad, it felt like there was no reservation to each other.

"There's not much time before the curfew of the girl's dormitory, so it will help if you make it short. The reason of you coming here is obvious anyway."

"It is because Miss is insincere like that that I had to come here."

To Krulcifer's words, the woman butler returned in a strong tone.

The butler Alterize with a strict character and the somewhat elusive Krulcifer didn't seem have that good of a relationship.

(Alterize-san's business which Krulcifer-san says is… after all)

While listening to their exchange, Lux recalled the circumstances until now.

Krulcifer's mission in which she must find a fiancé during attendance at the academy.

About how he was asked to become her lover in order to deceive the attendant of the Einvolk House.

"By the way—, who is that man?"

Alterize suddenly said as she turned her gaze to Lux.

"He's my lover. It's great, isn't it?"

"……!?"

The moment Krulcifer replied so, the shoulders of Lisha who was sitting nearby twitchily shook and she looked at their table.

"Your lover? That boy is…?"

Alterize asked with a dubious face.

"Yes. He may not be that familiar to you, but he is a Prince of the Old Empire, Lux Acadia. He is my classmate who commutes to the Royal Military Academy as the only male student there. Is there any problem?"

"……"

"There is a problem. Lux will from now on in various ways— Mmm…!?"

"I-I will listen to you later, so please be quiet for now."

Alterize suspiciously stared at Lisha, who interjected from the table nearby, and Lux who held her mouth as to calm her. And after heaving a deep sigh, she muttered.

"I see, that's really troublesome, the truth is—"

"Well, well—, I was looked down upon, too."

"……!?"

To the man's voice uttered suddenly, all the people present gasped in surprise.

The man wearing a red, gorgeous overcoat with treated golden embroidery was standing behind Alterize.

A tall and thin man who let his limbs peep out from under the overcoat.

Although with his golden hair and upright face, he seems to be a handsome man of gentle manners at first glance, but his slightly hypocritical smile and sharp eyes let one feel a somewhat overbearing atmosphere.

A knight with a strong confidence — or rather, clad in an armor of ego.

If it was someone seeing it for the first time, nine out ten people would have such an impression.

Having appeared before Lux and company was such a man.

"Lord Kreutzer!? Why are you here? I am sure that the dinner was scheduled for tomorrow, but—"

"Yes, it isn't like I've forgotten. Alterize-dono."

The man called so returned a smile to the surprised Alterize.

"I may not look like this, but I'm an annoying guy about fixed dates, you see. —But yes, if I dare to speak about my shortcomings, I'm a little bit impatient. I want to see the girl who will become my wife in the future one step earlier."

- grin*, twisting the edge of his lips, he turned his face to Krulcifer.

As he let his look crawl from her head to toes as if licking, the man satisfactorily nodded.

"Ooh. She's really a beauty as the rumors say. I may not look like this, but I've showed up several times to the social parties of the Capital, but— I've never seen such a beautiful girl. Your bodily build is slightly modest[6], but I look forward to your growth."

"I am honored that you praise her."

Replying so was Alterize.

“Alterize. Who is this person?”

As Krulcifer asked so with a cold expression,

“I see. It looks like you had not yet talk this through. Well then, I will give my name. My name is Barzeride Kreutzer.”

“……!?”

The moment when they heard the man’s words, tension ran through Lux and Lisha — no, throughout the whole bar including the customers around.

“…Don’t tell, one of the four Great Nobles!?”

“Why is the “titleholder of the Kingdom” here—?”

As several people inside the bar realized his identity, they turned their gazes with low voices.

“You mean Kreutzer of that House?”

Alterize nodded at Krulcifer’s question.

"One of the four Great Noble Families with historical lineage which continued to this day since the Old Empire era. Particularly, it is a noble household which produces many knights and Drag-Knights from generation to generation. This gentleman is its heir."

(If I remember correctly, the Kreutzer House is—)

Lux recalled after a little thought.

It was indeed a well-known noble House as a noble, but at the same time it was famous as the hawks of the Old Empire.

Regarding pedigree, influence and fortune, it was an outstanding House even in the New Kingdom.

But, the whole family's way of thinking virtually inherited the Old Empire's ideas, and Lux had not heard that many goods rumor about them from the past.

"An heir of the four Great Nobles…? Alterize, don't tell me you—"

Krulcifer who heard this slightly knitted her brows.

"Yes. While very selfish, I went ahead with the talk to introduce Miss to Lord Kreutzer by the dinner that I had scheduled for tomorrow, and have you exchange an engagement there. But—"

"Why didn't you inform me, the person concerned, of that?"

As Krulcifer asked in a amazed tone,

"It is because if I do not do at least this much, Miss will give a reason again and run away."

Alterize calmly replied without being shy.

It looked like although the relation between the two girls was not good, they knew each other's personality very well.

In short, seeing through the action of Krulcifer of avoiding the engagement by giving a reason one way or another, Alterize seemed to have scheduled to bring the fiancé she personally chose.

Thanks to that, it became quite a chaotic situation.

"I see. But, it's really a shame. As you see, now I have a man I'm going out with. Isn't it? Lux-kun."

"Eh…? Ah, yes. Kind of—"

Lux became confused as the subject was brought forth by Krulcifer.

"Lux…? Ah, I see. That appearance—, so you're a survivor of the Old Empire's royalty. This is the first time we exchange words directly like this, eh."

Barzeride who was quiet until then approached Lux.

After staring at his face for a while, he slowly opened his mouth.

"Hmm… It's a weak look hardly thinkable of someone from former royalty. As expected of a dog which was let to live by the New Kingdom's amnesty. —You're really worthy to be called the Chore Prince."

"……"

A smile and tone including contempt.

As Lux remained calm even when being shown such clear hostility,

"Alterize-dono. Is there really a need to postpone this engagement because of a man of this level?"

Barzeride added so as to incite him.

"Certainly, he is from the former royal family. In such a meaning, he may have a lot of influence in various places, but now he's just an unsightly fallen Prince. He's a man only living by receiving others' leftovers. I judge

that he isn't a man worthy of the lineage of the country Ymir's prestigious family that you serve, the Einvolk family"

"Certainly, that is—"

The moment when Alterize was pressed and was about to consent,

"Haa. Even if you claim to be from the four Great Nobles, it's only to this degree after all."

A girl's dignified voice suddenly cut off the conversation.

The voice was from Lisha sitting by the nearby table.

"To think that you can't even see through the worth of the man before you. I'm really glad for having the number of rivals decrease, but could you refrain from such a rude tone? Lord Kreutzer."

After talking with a proud smile, Lisha scowled at the two people at last.

Though he did not seem to be overwhelmed by it, Barzeride shot back a gaze.

"If I remember correctly, you're—"

"First Princess of the New Kingdom, Lizsharte Atismata. Lux is the man who is going to become my partner. If you dare to insult him, then I will riposte."

After Barzeride remained silent for several seconds to Lisha's sharp words,

"…Kukuku. Hahahahaha!"

He suddenly burst into laughter.

"What's so funny?"

"What do we have here… so that's it. It looks the fallen Prince of the Old Empire is quite good at currying girls' favors. However — the era from here on will be one of battles/fighting. Powerful people who destroy the appearing Abysses and win against other countries in the fight for ruins are sought above all. And we, the royalty and titled nobility, must excel at the skill in operating Drag-Rides. The power as a Drag-Knight and strength as a leader are sought above else."

Prefacing so, Barzeride once again turned his face towards Lux.

"Unfortunately, I'm on an entirely different level from this man. It's a waste of time. Alterize-dono, I would like you to arrange the engagement as soon as possible, even tomorrow would work."

"Yes. —Then tomorrow night as scheduled."

When Alterize was going to settle so,

"Could you wait for a moment?"

Holding back Lisha who was about to complain again, Krulcifer said so.

"Hou. What's the matter? Do you want to talk with me ? My future wife."

"From here on, power as a Drag-Knight and power as a leader are above else. You said so, right?"

"Yes, the Einvolk House also thinks so. Therefore, Lord Kreutzer who is from the four Great Nobles and the "titleholder of the New Kingdom" is suitable as a fiancé– –"

"Is that really so?"

As she interrupted Alterize's words, Krulcifer revealed a smile.

"What do you mean?"

"If it's about skill as a Drag-Knight, my lover doesn't lose, too. Because he is the "Weakest Undefeated" famous at the New Kingdom's tournament after all."

"Fuhahahahaha!"

Barzeride who heard that burst into laughter once gain .

"The "Weakest Undefeated", huh. Now that you mention it, there was also such a shameful nickname, eh. But — my future wife. Wise as you are, you understand, right? That a coward who only defends himself can't gain anything."

"But, in the tournament of the Capital, it isn't like you also won against him, right?"

"What…?"

"And, could you please stop that way of calling me " my future wife"? You and I are still just strangers."

"……"

The expression of Barzeride who heard that suddenly changed into a dangerous one.

"Lord Kreutzer. Please excuse her rudeness—"

When Alterize was hurriedly going to intercede,

"I see. Isn't the Einvolk House's daughter quite a capable person. I like you more and more, Krulcifer."

Distorting his mouth into an arc, Barzeride remained composed.

But, Lux knew.

That behind his expression apparently calm at first glance, a quiet anger burned.

"Well then, let's see. How about a match between me and that fallen Prince? A duel with Drag-Rides, that is."

"____"

At Barzeride's words, tension ran within the store.

"L- Lord Kreutzer, that's—"

When Alterize uttered so in surprise,

"Certainly, it looks like you didn't inform her of the talk of engagement. It's your fault for not having gotten her consent on this matter. However, there is no way she would consent if you forcibly concluded an engagement here, right? After showing my ability, the marriage would go smoothly."

Sending a gaze at Krulcifer as if asking, Barzeride said.

His intention of wanting to make this stubborn, yet smart girl yield on this occasion was transparent and visible.

"To the fight this time, there will be no "draw", but you don't possibly intend to run away, do you, Fallen Prince?"

"……"

Being provoked, Lux hesitated to speak.

Thinking about the future, he mustn't stand out too much.

He understood that well.

But,

"—Understood. I'll do it."

After a slight hesitation, Lux nodded.

If he did not accept the duel here, the engagement between Krulcifer and Barzeride would've almost been decided.

He could not use <Bahamut>, but he had no choice but to do it.

"No, I cannot afford to cause Lord Kreutzer trouble…"

When Alterize could not consent and was about to interject as such,

"On this occasion, why don't you also participate in the duel?"

Krulcifer suggested so calmly.

"…What do you mean?"

"It will not look good if I, the person concerned and you, the person in charge who approached with this matter are just spectators. We might as well make it a duel of two vs. two altogether; how is that?"

"W-What are you saying now!? Please stop with the joke! Do you think that Lord Kreutzer would ride on this —"

"It does not fit my nature to just be waiting for the result like a commodity."

As Krulcifer said so without hesitation,

"Kukuku, I don't mind."

Barzeride readily consent with a fearless smile.

"Isn't it good, Alterize-dono? A fight without grudge is the very purpose of the duel. Besides, I'm a pacifist, but there are often times when I want to go all out. After all in the tournament of the Capital, I instinctively hold back so that there are no injured"

He extended his hand to the hilt of the sheathed Sword Device and swung it with a clank.

Probably, a Divine Drag-Ride was stored in the scabbard with a showy ornament.

"It's regrettable for tomorrow's dinner, but we'll cancel it. Then, let's say the night three days later. I'll prepare the place for the duel. On account of the work, I'm staying at the Fort City for a while. Don't run away."

When only saying that, Barzeride let his luxurious overcoat flutter and left the bar.

"……"

A flaccid atmosphere flowed before long and bustle return to inside the bar.

"Phew…"

As Lux whose strain loosened sighed,

"You two, do you know what you have done?"

Alterize frowned with a tone as to admonish them.

"Not only did you reject the engagement, but on top of that — you also challenged a member of the four Great Nobles to a duel. You carried your joke too far. Lord

Kreutzer possesses the Divine Drag-Ride <Aži Dahāka> and is skilled enough to be called "titleholder of the New Kingdom" in the Capital, you know?"

Barzeride boasted of the record of last year's third rank in the tournament of the Capital.

Lux who had similarly appeared in the tournament also knew that, but—

"If it's a Divine Drag-Ride, I also have <Fafnir>. There is no need to be so afraid, right?"

Looking at Krulcifer who showed no signs of being perturbed, Alterize anxiously held down her head.

And after several seconds, she raised her face.

"I understand. However, that person's ability as a Drag-Knight —and his influence is something clear even in the New Kingdom now. And it looks like I have also spoiled you too much."

"Spoiled me? You were just afraid of touching the tumor[7], right? Same as the people in that House—"

"……"

At Krulcifer's smile which mixed sarcasm, Alterize tightened her expression.

As she quietly stood up from her seat, she put some money tickets on the table.

"I will leave it as it is for tonight. I will show no mercy in this fight with you two."

Saying just that, the woman dressed as a butler left the bar.

(What on earth did she mean by "the people in that House"—?)

Lux wondered whether anything happened between the Einvolk House and Krulcifer in the past.

A strange silence flowed among Lux and the others.

"It's almost the time of curfew. Let's already go back for today."

To Krulcifer's words emitted before long, Lux and company decided to go back.

Part 3

"—Just a while ago, I did something bad to you, Lux-kun."

Krulcifer muttered so as the four people were on their way back walking to the academy side by side.

At her unusually depressed voice, Lux hurried shook his head.

"No… But more importantly, are you really fine with that?"

The mission of engagement imposed on Krulcifer.

Though he had certainly heard about it, Lux was inwardly surprised at the emotional resistance that did not seem like her who was always calm.

"I see, in other words Krulcifer didn't want a political marriage of convenience and asked Lux to play the role of her lover, huh. Thank god… I'm now relieved."

Lisha stroked her chest as she felt relieved and then cocked her head in puzzlement.

"But, that butler — was it Alterize? For a mere butler, she is impudent, or rather she was a somewhat strange fellow."

"……"

Lux also felt it.

Even disregarding the point that it was a strict noble family, he felt like that butler and Krulcifer did not have the ordinary master/servant relation for some reason.

That it was something which was not a mere intimate or bad relationship.

"Don't mind it. Alterize has been like that since long ago after all. That aside, you saved me by accepting the duel proposed by Lord Kreutzer."

Krulcifer smiled and looked at Lux walking beside her.

Being stared at by her transparent, beautiful pupils, Lux's heart could not help pounding.

"M-More importantly, is it all right? A duel with those two…"

"Although I was calm at that time, it's really troublesome, eh. If you could use that Divine Drag-Ride, there would have been no problem, but—"

The "Black Hero" who destroyed the Old Empire five years ago.

Lux could not afford to let Barzeride and Alterize know that he was <Bahamut>'s user.

Moreover, in terms of strength the opponent this time was in no way comparable to the temporary instructors a few days ago.

On one hand, an Ex-class's Drag-Knight prominent even in the large country Ymir of the North.

On the other hand, a Drag-Knight who was the user of the Divine Drag-Ride <Aži Dahāka> and the third rank in the tournament of the Capital.

Even if it was a pair with Krulcifer who had the Divine Drag-Ride <Fafnir>, it could be said that it would be fairly tough to fight only with a <Wyvern> against those two people as opponents.

"What, there's no need to be afraid. Lux was able to defend with his <Wyvern> even against my <Tiamat> as the opponent. Then, other male Drag-Knights whose Machine Dragon aptitude values are low should soon be worn out if you gain time."

"It will be good if it goes like this—"

Lux somehow guessed the meaning of Krulcifer's words, too.

In the tournament of the Capital, the battle time is a little short and rules had been established to be advantageous to men.

There were traces of the rules established in the Old Empire era, but even if deducting it[8], it seemed that Barzeride would handle a Divine Drag-Ride without difficulty.

Therefore, now that the Old Empire was destroyed, he's called the "titleholder of the New Kingdom" as a leading figure of the new era.

Lux did not know about <Aži Dahāka>'s Divine Raiment, except its name <Avestā >.

Moreover, it was a duel where he could not aim for a draw this time.

Fighting under such conditions, even Lux also felt somewhat uneasy.

"You don't get angry, huh."

As he was lost in such thoughts, Krulcifer beside him suddenly muttered so.

"Eh…?"

"Normally, you will be angry for having been dragged into such a duel. Even though you are not a real lover—"

"No… It's something I said myself after all."

Honestly speaking, Even Lux didn't know why he had decided to accept the duel at that time.

He would probably be scolded by his little sister Airi for that.

"Thank you. I will say so first for the time being."

But, Lux did not regret anything.

Rather, he thought that he wanted to know more about Krulcifer who thanked him shyly.

"All right! Well then, let's hurry back at once; I will strengthen Lux's <Wyvern>. This time for sure, for the specification of attack specialization—"

"Ah, you don't need to do that…"

As Lux returned a serious look and shook his head,

"Kuh! T-Then…, I will equipped it with a special hidden function which I had thought about since some time now—"

"You know?"

Philphie who had been tagging along in silence until now muttered with a serious look.

"If we don't hurry, the curfew will pass."

"Eeeeeeh!?"

They looked at each other and unintentionally cried out.

They hurriedly ran back, but in the end they did not make in time.

The early morning of the next day, the four people received the punishment of cleaning duty.

Part 4

That night when Lux and company were hurrying on their way back, a meeting was held.

Sitting on the seats of a round table illuminated by a chandelier were seven men and women dressed in dress, formal clothes or military uniform.

The three people who sat down at the head of the table were Queen Raffi, the Prime Minister and the vice-commander of an army of the New Kingdom.

The remaining four people were the most prominent Dukes called the Four Great Nobles.

Family heads of prestigious families which governed the territories of the Old Empire for a long time, and held great influence and power even afterwards.

There was a big middle-aged man with a good complexion, a white bearded old man whose eyes became hollow like a skeleton, a gentleman in his prime with well-ordered features and, a long-haired man who put on a dark red overcoat with an ornament of steel.

That room where the New Kingdom's influential persons gathered together was filled with solemn tension .

"I wonder how many years it has been since we were all summoned like this."

The old man's hoarse voice first broke the silence.

"Isn't it since the New Kingdom establishment? I almost forgot your faces. After all, business is going well in my territory."

"At any rate. Does this mean that Her Majesty the Queen needs our help?"

Ignoring the middle-aged man who responded with a joke, the man in his prime summarized.

The Queen who was asked calmly nodded and urged the Prime Minister beside her.

"It is the matter of the letter sent to you two months ago. Regarding the Heiburg Republic and its three allied countries."

"Don't tell it's still the incident due to that black marketer? I heard that not only did he circulated a large quantity of Drag-Rides to the Heiburg Republic, but for some reason, he has also wholesaled suspicious devices (tools) in even this country, but—"

To the old man's voice, the Prime Minister shook his head and answered.

"It is not about that. It is about the Ragnarok this time. "

Hearing that, the middle-aged man raised his face.

"Ragnarok, huh. I have heard about it several times from the Old Empire era, but to think it really existed."

Ragnarok.

There are seven Abysses which concealed paranormal power of which it's said that there exists only one for each of the ruins.

It was said that the legendary class monster whose hugeness and strength were on an entirely different level from a common Abyss erased several towns and villages in the territory eight years ago in the Old Empire era and moreover, destroyed territories of other countries and even small countries themselves.

However, because it was an event which the Old Empire's administration had kept secret, only a restricted number of persons knew that truth even now.

"I see. So you are trying to say that on top of this, the evidence about the Ragnarok's existence, that was said to have appeared from the ruins of our country, was collected?"

To the words of the man in his prime, the Prime Minister nodded with a bitter face.

The serious damage which one Ragnarok, released after the Old Empire wrenched the ruins open, once brought upon every place in the world. The responsibility of that was demanded to the New

Kingdom several years after the Old Empire was destroyed.

On the occasion of the coup d'état five years ago, one of the government officials who fled into a foreign country spread a document of the Old Empire related to the Ragnarok, and the Heiburg Republic which took that proof had impeached the New Kingdom.

"The Heiburg Republic was originally a major power second to the Old Empire. They have a big influence in the neighboring countries now. If we reject this appeal, let alone the three allied countries, we will make enemies of the whole world, right?"

"Thus we shall discuss a counter-measure— huh? But, wasn't the Ragnarok's subjugation completed seven years ago?"

"It seems that it's temporarily petrified and is just lying dormant. According to the scout's reports, the petrifaction of the Ragnarok which is at the Lidneth seashore has begun to melt (loosen?) gradually a few months ago. Therefore—"

"Do you want to say that they want us to engage it once again?"

"The Heiburg Republic demands of us the Ragnarok's subjugation. However, it's too dangerous to fight the Ragnarok, which was finally put to sleep after cooperating with other countries even in those days, with only the New Kingdom army."

"Even if we make the small number of high level Drag-Knights strike all together, the odds of victory will probably be small. As expected, Divine Drag-Rides' users have to lead the subjugation unit—"

When they reached that conclusion, silence rose for a while.

They understood even without any words.

That the Ragnarok's subjugation was accompanied with a high death risk.

And that there was no suitable "Hero" which could settle it in the current New Kingdom.

"—In that case, I will send my son."

"…Lord Kreutzer!?"

Not having uttered a single word despite being there, the man who remained silent spoke.

That man which wore the ornament of steel on his body and emitted an unusual intimidating air was named Warg Kreutzer.

“My son has a Divine Drag-Ride called <Aži Dahāka> which he obtained one year ago. He’s also skilled at handling it and has enough ability to be ranked third in the tournament of the Capital. I think that he is qualified enough to be the commanding officer, but what do you think? Your Majesty the Queen Raffi.”

Queen Raffi was cautious (looked out) to Warg Kreutzer who talked with a fearless smile.

Among the Four Great Nobles, certain black rumors did not die out about the Kreutzer House.

Dangerous rumors such as whether this great Noble who possessed a vast territory and was followed by many private soldiers was not originally scheming for a takeover of the Old Empire.

"We cannot afford to expose Her Highness Princess Lizsharte to danger. Please, leave this matter to this subordinate."

"—Understood."

Queen Raffi finally nodded to Warg who suggested this while exaggeratedly bowing his head.

At the same time, Warg revealed a smile as if to say that he was waiting for this time.

"However, for this important task where I'm likely to lose not only the Drag-Knights of my territory, but also my son and his Divine Drag-Ride, aside from war funds, soldiers, and Machine Dragons, I think I would also like to have a certain reward."

"That's—"

"It's the full authority on the Atismata New Kingdom army. I would like you to give me the position of General on the occasion when my son Barzeride achieved the mission."

With eyes full of ambition, Warg said so.

Episode3 - The Sixth Ruins – One Garden

Part 1

Fort City first block. A white stately mansion located in the dwelling district of the wealthy.

Two persons were sitting on a sofa in a spacious living room.

One of them was a man characterized by his blond hair and high stature, Barzeride Kreutzer.

The other was an existence with sharp piercing eyes which put on a jet black robe and a hood which covered over his eyes.

Inside, the house was illuminated by the sunlight flowing in through the windows and there was no presence of other people such as servants.

"So — how is it? The condition of the Divine Drag-Ride <Aži Dahāka> that I sold—"

"Yeah. It's splendid, my friend. I was finally able to perfectly master its Divine Raiment. I still content myself with third place in the tournament of the Capital for now

, but—. If I feel like it, this country's Drag-Knights will no longer be opponents for me."

To the existence with the robe, the blond man full of confidence answered while returning a smile.

"I see; it's as expected of you, my sworn friend. Then– – I count on you for the matter we have talked about."

Barzeride smiled at the familiar voice.

"If I remember correctly, it was about me marrying that young woman of Earl of Ymir, right? The fact that she is a foreign woman will be a bit of a problem, but is there anything special with her?"

"She is a "key". The key to unlock the seal of ruins, she has that kind of power. In order to reach a deep level where humanity has never gone in until now."

"Then—"

"Yeah, I want to entrust it to you. Therefore, it doesn't matter whatever means you use. Be sure to conquer (subdue) her and by using her power — I want you to

wrench the doors of the ruins open. If you do so, I'll leave half of the ruins' treasures and this country's rule which will someday fall into our hands to you."

"Kuku, I understand. That woman seems to be quite proud, but such a female is worth breaking. I'll live up to your expectations, my friend."

Barzeride shook his shoulders and joyfully laughed.

As he imagined his military rule in the future.

"Well then, I will take my leave. You don't need to see me off."

"Yeah, see you again, my friend."

Saying only that, the existence with the robe soundlessly left the mansion.

After Barzeride went up to the second floor of the mansion, and saw with his own eyes from the window that the figure disappeared in the alley,

"Hmph. Don't think that you can tame me forever. Well, it's fine; if you say I can use whatever means, then there are many measures to consider."

Saying so, Barzeride tightly grasped the Sword Device at hand and clicked his tongue.

"I'm looking forward to it. This country's next King — will be me."

Part 2

"Phew…"

It was the day after they agreed to a duel with Barzeride.

Lux who welcomed lunch break in the classroom was a little sleepy.

Since he handled a classmate's request today from earlier this morning, he was a little tired.

This was because he thought that it wasn't good that he gave so much priority to Krulcifer's request that he hardly listened to other girls', but—

(As expected, I overdid it a little, I guess…)

On account of his life of odd jobs, when it grew dark, he went to bed and made sure to relieve fatigue for the next day's work, but, since he came to this academy, he had worked even more as much as he was usually taken care of.

He didn't know whether or not she guessed it, but Krulcifer unusually released Lux saying "I have some business to take care of today".

Though it wasn't a bad feeling to live as Krulcifer's " lover", as expected spending time with her who was much more elegant than him was unexpectedly nerve wracking.

Thus, when it had been long since he lazed; lying down on the desk, Tillfarr, one of the Triad, gently poked the shoulder of Lux who was half asleep.

"Oh my, I see that your girlfriend isn't here today. Lux-cchi, you're lonely, right?"

To the carefree smile like a flower, Lux raised his face with a wry smile.

"Errr, is it for a work or something?"

"Oh, you may say that, I guess? Seems like you've been abandoned. Then, can you tag along with me a little ?"

Tillfarr naturally took Lux's hand and left the classroom with him.

Other students who were withholding due to the matter of Krulcifer's "lover" were showing faces saying " damn it, I was late".

"Okay. It's here."

When they walked down the corridor a little, they arrived in front of a certain room before he was aware.

"Huh? This is the drawing room, but—?"

It's originally a room for visitors or guests, but is it all right to enter now?

As Lux was thinking so,

"It's all right. There is no plan for it to be used today, and we got permission from the Principal. Well then, I'll go prepare, so wait. Ah, peeping is forbidden."

The mastermind Tillfarr who brought him along left Lux and went somewhere.

"What on earth does this mean…?"

Rather, what does she mean by peeping?

Lux sat on the sofa while being puzzled, but probably because of fatigue, he had fallen into a light sleep.

"N, Ngh…"

"Sorry to keep you waiting! Then, excuse me!"

When he suddenly woke up and raised his face, he heard a knock on the door and then Tillfarr's voice.

"Ah, welcome—, wait, eeeeh!?"

Lux who was still half asleep couldn't help but doubt his own eyes as he saw the outfits of the girls who entered.

"—I'm coming in, Lux."

"Lu-chan. You're drooling."

Standing there were Lisha and Philphie dressed in unfamiliar maid outfits.

Following after them was Tillfarr holding plates of food in both hands.

"So, in order to heal Lux-cchi's daily fatigue, let us serve you. Master, rest slowly."

Looking at Tillfarr's who winked and the other two's appearances, Lux opened his mouth flabbergasted.

It was a plain black maid outfit with a white brim, but as the clothes were a little customized, the skirt was cut rather short.

As for Philphie, her big breasts were also emphasized and it was a very bewitching appearance.

"Errr — what is this?"

"Well you know, master. I was also consulted by Lisha-sama as to how to make Lux-cchi happy. Because the Princess says that she doesn't really know what can make a man your age happy, so—"

"H-Hey. You promised not to say that, right!?"

At Tillfarr who openly talked, Lisha blushed in panic.

"—And then, we reached the conclusion that imagining the scene of the time when Lux was a Prince, and serving you as maids was the most pleasing to do."

"But, I hadn't gotten maids to take care of me that much—"

"Then, you should use this opportunity to fully enjoy it. We're all amateurs though."

As expected of the class's mood maker, she forcibly pushed forward the talk.

Then, she began to display the dishes on the table.

Since it was just lunch time, too, they seemed to want him to eat here.

(Is it all right to do something like this in the academy's drawing room…?)

Though it isn't as if Lux didn't think so just a little,

"Um — Is it troublesome? Doing something like this suddenly…?"

Looking at Lisha in her maid outfit averting her eyes slightly embarrassed, he changed his mood.

"No, I'm very happy. Thank you, Lisha-sama."

"……!? N-No, um — f-for the time being today, you may think of me as being your maid and do somewhat indecent things like when you were young…"

"I won't do that!? What do you think I was when I was young!?"

"I-I see. Tillfarr said that such things seem to be a maid 's work, too…"

"……"

As Lux turned a surprised look, Tillfarr whistled acting as if she knew nothing.

Though Lux found it really troublesome, he was honestly happy that they were concerned about him who was tired.

"Lu-chan. The meal will cool down."

"Since it's a rare opportunity, a maid will feed you. Lisha-sama."

"……!? A-As expected, that's more embarrassing, or rather—"

"…Shall I do it?"

"N-No, let me do it after all. Can I, Lux!?"

Though Lisha was somewhat reserved, she said so as to oppose Philphie.

Then, she picked up a sandwich put on the plate and held it out to Lux's mouth.

"U-Um, thank you for the meal."

Since the other two were watching steadily, it felt somewhat awkward, but Lux ate the sandwich from Lisha's hand.

It had the taste and texture of fresh vegetables, ham, eggs, spices, and sauce.

Since there was also the fact that Lux was also hungry, the sandwich which seemed to be homemade smoothly went into his stomach.

"U-Um, how is the taste? Just to note, we had the dining room's cook help us with it—"

"It's very delicious."

As he replied so to Lisha in her maid outfit who asked with upturned eyes,

"Haw…!?"

Lisha blushed and stiffened on the spot.

"Lux ate it… It's somehow very exciting. Doing something like this."

While leaking a seductive sigh, Lisha carried the sandwich to Lux's mouth with tottering hands. The dish which was put on a large plate was eaten in no time.

"Here, water. Afterwards well, let's see; shall I massage your shoulders?"

As Lisha was looking outside from the window from the room with an entranced expression, Tillfarr gave him water and gently massaged Lux's shoulders.

Then, Philphie who was silent until now also put a large plate on the table.

"I made a dessert."

"T-Thank you — wait, the dessert after the meal is this !? Isn't it a little unreasonable!?"

It was a circular pancake — no, it which was made in seven thick layers could already be regarded as a cylinder.

When Lux hurriedly questioned so,

"…Lu-chan is, cold. Even though you gladly ate it long ago."

Abruptly looking away as if her pride was wounded, Philphie sulked.

Pancakes were certainly Philphie's specialty when they were young, but—

"N-No. I like this, too. It wasn't so much in the old days — b-but, it's so nostalgic, I'm happy."

When he hurriedly corrected himself like so, Philphie's good mood returned as she said "really?".

"Then, let's eat together. We can finish it if we eat together."

Philphie showing a gentle smile and Lux began to eat the pancake tower together.

After eating two layers, Lux was down and unable to continue; in the end, Philphie ate up the rest in the blink of an eye.

Though it was quite interesting and was a feast for his eyes, Lux thought at last with a wry smile.

(In the end, the three of them were not maid-like at all …)

Part 3

"Oh, you finally came! I was waiting for you, Lux."

Then — After school of that day.

Lux showed up in the Drag-Knight's atelier by Lisha's request.

The unique smell of metal and oil which acridly assailed his nose.

And, countless assembled Machine Dragons standing in a row was a magnificent view no matter how many times one saw it.

One could understand by seeing that Lisha had put on a white gown on her uniform, and was doing her work as an engineer.

"Errr, so, for today's work—"

"W-Well…, leave aside the talk of work for the time being and make yourself comfortable. I'll get you some tea now, so—"

"Oh, then I'll do it."

As Lux offered so due to his usual odd jobs' habit, and was about to head to the small kitchen located in the back of the atelier.

"No. There's no need. I, the younger one, should do it."

"You should just sit down there, Nii-san."

"Huh…?"

Standing there were two familiar girls, his little sister Airi and her friend Nokuto.

"Why are you here, too—?"

"We had a little business regarding Machine Dragons; since it's a rare opportunity — are we in your way? Nii-san."

Airi said with a somewhat implying smile.

"Ah geez, Lux! Come back here!"

Lisha who saw that called out to him from the sofa.

"Geez, I can at least explain it by myself…"

Judging from Lisha somehow discontented, Airi and Nokuto seemed to have forcibly intruded on here.

After a while, tea poured into cups was carried, and Airi and Nokuto also sat down before the work unit.

And, Airi spread several sheets of papers there.

"This is—"

"Yes. It's the output analysis result of <Bahamut> that Nii-san uses. I observed the last battle on Nokuto's < Drake>."

"……"

Lux slowly looked over the bunch of paper.

Starting with the estimated output when he used the Divine Raiment, detailed records such as the estimated time of operation limit were written.

Airi probably collected them over many hours for Lux to use <Bahamut> someday.

By increasing the output, one would be able to momentarily generate a strong power, but in return, the consumption would be huge.

A precise adjustment of the output of the Drag-Ride and each armament was carried out in accordance with the ability and aptitude of the user.

However, unlike a general-purpose Machine Dragon, for a Divine Drag-Ride whose existence was confirmed and it was said that there was only one for each species in the world, there was no standard value of adjustment, and it was the present fact that analyses aren't readily advanced.

Especially regarding <Bahamut>, since Lux could not afford to use it very often, time was required to analyze it .

But—,

“While looking at it, I made a fine output adjustment to <Bahamut>. As expected, it was hard to do it until now since there was no data. I cut the output which is likely to be vainly used as much as possible, so I think you can fight quite easily more than before.”

“Thank you, Lisha-sama.”

As Lux turned a smile, Lisha suddenly blushed and averted her eyes.

“Ah, yes… If you say it like that, then it was worth my doing my best. U-Um, as a reward, if you could hold me–_”

“Nokuto and I also helped, Nii-san.”

“Ah, thank you both of you.”

“Yes. I feel obliged.”

“—H-Hey!? I haven’t finished talking yet!”

Ignoring Lisha who shouted from behind, Airi continued the talk.

"By the way, it doesn't mean that I want you to fight for a long period of time. So, please do not act rashly. That — you understand, right?"

"Ah, yes. I know."

To Lux's smile, Airi also returned a smile.

"With that said, Nokuto. I cannot trust Nii-san, so I can only rely on you."

"Yes. Roger, Airi."

"Hey, hey!? What do you mean? You don't trust me!?"

"It's obvious, right? Even though you always ignore my advices and rampage as you please."

"……"

When being told so, he thought that she was actually right; so his ears hurt.

"Well, in tomorrow's 'Abyss subjugation' and 'ruins investigation', as expected I don't think <Bahamut> should be used."

Lisha suddenly muttered as she folded her arms.

“Ah, speaking of which—”

The ruins’ investigation by “Knight Squadron” that he was told about by Relie.

The day for that to happen should be tomorrow.

The objective was the subjugation of a Golem, a large Abyss which appeared around the ruins.

As well as the sixth ruins — Garden’s investigation.

Originally, that mission would be carried out by a unit whose members were half composed of those elected from the “Knight Squadron”, but this time by Relie’s recommendation, Lux was also going to tag along as an exception.

Of course, he could not afford to let <Bahamut>’s existence be known to the other members of the “Knight Squadron”, so he did not want to act too much rashly, but—

“Don’t worry. After all, the commanding officer this time is me.”

Drinking tea contained in the cup, Lisha stuck out her chest.

“While we are it, I also prepared the most recently drawn map of the “Garden”, so please keep it in mind during this evening.”

“Ah, yes. Thank you.”

Lux nodded and thanked Airi’s consideration.

The ruins were labyrinths whose existences had been confirmed to number seven in the world presently and in which ancient technology slept.

Drag-Rides, Abysses and unknown technology.

This place was an existence which brought various things in the world and prompted rapid evolution and development in these past ten years.

Among the three ruins which were in the territory of and around the New Kingdom, the sixth ruin, the “ Garden” was the place where investigation had advanced the most in the present situation, but even so – – its whole aspect had not been clarified yet.

But, since it was a matter which had continued since the Old Empire era, it was a path which could not be avoided.

"This time, as expected Krulcifer won't tag along. So, you may rely on me without reserve, Lux."

"Is that so?"

To Lisha who tapped his shoulder smilingly, Lux returned so.

"Yes. In her case, there is that "condition" after all."

Krulcifer was a foreign student of the country Ymir.

Therefore, on the occasion of fighting in this Atismata New Kingdom, her unique standard was determined.

When it came to the subjugation of a dangerous Abyss, Krulcifer should basically not participate.

(I wonder if she'll be right by herself. Krulcifer-san…)

However, Lux was anxious about going and leaving her alone.

It should be the safest if she didn't go to the ruin investigation, but—

"Okay, this talk is over. Therefore, how about you young girls go back? I want to talk with Lux about a slightly personal matter, you see?"

"A talk?"

"Ah, yes… well."

When Lisha was about to begin talking,

- knock-knock*

They heard a light knock.

"Good evening!"

Before they could reply, opening the door and entering was Tillfarr of the Triad.

"What are you all doing? It looks very interesting, so let me in."

"As usual, you're someone who can't read the atmosphere…"

Lisha turned reproachful eyes at the cheerful Tillfarr and sighed.

"Why did you come here for? Tillfarr."

As she couldn't just watch that without doing anything, Nokuto also of the Triad asked just as amazed.

"Well, there is a message for Lux-cchi. From Principal Relie; she said that tonight after about five o'clock—, you 'll be able to enter the bathroom."

"Ah, I see."

At these words, Lux also forgot their talk about the ruins and stood up.

About the bathing in the girl's dormitory, Lux was basically prohibited from going in, but there was a certain period of time when he could use the bathroom; about once a week.

When the female students finished their bathing and there were no other users, he was called out by the manager such as the dormitory leader and was allowed to enter all alone.

Since he usually got it over with only wiping his body with a towel dipped in cold or hot water, bathing was a rare opportunity for Lux.

"Then, even if I go—"

"Hmm…, it can't be helped. Let's call it a day. Let's talk about this another time."

With Lisha's permission, Lux left the Machine Dragon's atelier.

And he went straight to the large public bath of the girl's dormitory.

Part 4

"Phew. It's been a while since I was in a bath—"

He carefully knocked on the door of the dressing room and bathroom, and after having confirmed that there was nobody inside, he put the plate "under cleaning" outside and took off his clothes.

Although he had properly gotten permission from the Principal, as expected he couldn't help being nervous just by being in the bathroom of the girl's dormitory.

Marble pillars, and the large bathroom which lamps faintly illuminated.

After dashing hot water over himself at the washing place, he slowly washed his body and finally immersed his whole body into the bathtub.

I was regularly bathing in my Imperial Court life when I was young, but after beginning my life of Chores, I was hardly able to take a proper bath; so this is also a side benefit, Lux thought.

He relaxed his whole body and entrusted it to the buoyancy of hot water.

The sensation of his muscles, which got tired with daily odd jobs and training, getting loose was comfortable.

"Haa…"

Originally a time of the supreme bliss that he could rarely taste.

Nevertheless, there was a certain concern in Lux's head.

It was about the duel over Krulcifer's engagement.

There was no problem to the fact that it had come to a duel — to the fight itself.

However, aside from the woman butler Alterize, Barzeride was a dangerous opponent.

And, he was also worried about Krulcifer who had also decided to fight.

(I don't really understand though. She doesn't seem to have a very good relationship with her home—)

Of course, since it was about Krulcifer, she was probably doing well; but it somehow felt like she did not trust the members of the Einvolk House.

This might be because Lux, who was treated as a parasite among the imperial family before, put himself in her place that he ended up thinking so.

"……"

Lux gently closed his eyes while being soaked into the bathtub.

Tomorrow, Lux would join the ruins investigation by the "Knight Squadron" for the first time.

"I hope we'll be able to come back safely—"

As he talked like so to himself.

- chapun*. The sound of water splashing could be heard immediately nearby.

"Eh—?"

When he spontaneously opened his eyes and looked at the figure hidden in the white steam,

"…… Huh?"

A familiar pink-haired girl looked at Lux with her absentminded eyes and tilted her head to the side.

"—Wait, eeeeeeeeeeeeh!?"

Standing with a splashy sound, Lux could not help but draw back in the bathtub.

As he flung his back on the wall, he finally grasped the present situation.

"It's rude. Lu-chan."

When Philphie who let her hair down said so with a serious look,

"Ah, s-sorry— not that!? Why is Phil…Phi-chan here!? Um, wasn't there a plate "under cleaning" outside!?"

"It's because I came back late for training today. Onee-chan said that the bath is still opened—"

"……"

At her indifferent words, Lux guessed.

This situation was definitely Philphie's mischievous big sister, Principal Relie's doing.

"Geez, what is she thinking!? That person…!"

No matter if they were childhood friends, she should not let a young lady and a man their age sleep and take a bath together.

It looked like Philphie herself did not mind it, but there was a problem after all.

"S-Sorry. W-Well then, I'll immediately go out, so—"

As Lux, thinking so, was about to get out of the bathtub,

"—Why?"

Philphie returned a straight face.

"No, after all!? Even Phi-chan hates it, right!? To take a bath with me, a man—"

As Lux confusedly said so,

"I will never take a bath with a man I don't like."

Bending her head slightly to one side, she replied with a serious look.

Lux's face reflexively became red

"N-No, I'm not talking about that—"

When Lux said so while covering his eyes with his hand,

"It's been a long time since I took a bath with Lu-chan. It's really nostalgic…"

Philphie smiled as she said so in a hearty tone.

"……"

Her tone looked really happy for her, who was usually taciturn, and Lux somehow hesitated about getting out of the bathtub.

(N-No, but—, it doesn't change the fact that it's ethically wrong!)

Within his whole body conflict and embarrassment seethed, Lux threw a fleeting glance at the figure of Philphie slightly away.

It was beautiful.

Her big amber eyes and her flushed cheeks.

Her fluffy pink hair got wet and slightly stuck on her skin.

And, her white, firm skin and big chest which floated in the bathtub—

(Wait, looking more than this is bad…!)

Lux looked away and somehow maintained his reason which almost collapsed unintentionally.

As he threw a fleeting sidelong glance at Philphie after calming down after several deep breaths—

"…Kukah"

"She actually fell asleep!? Wait, you can't sleep here, Phil—"

Unintentionally drawing near, he lightly shook Philphie's shoulders soaking in the bathtub.

Her vivid body temperature and the feel of her smooth skin.

The rich swelling which shook together with Philphie shaken back and forth.

(W-Wait, I can see her breasts…! From the front is bad!)

Lux's gaze was attracted to her half exposed big chest floating in the hot water, and his throat quickly got dry.

In order to restrain himself, as he got up from the bathtub at once, put his hands on Philphie's shoulders from behind and lightly shook her—

"Huh—?"

For an instant, a strange sense of discomfort cooled down Lux's mind.

Lux himself, not knowing immediately the reason, stiffened for about several seconds.

"Ngh… what's wrong? Lu-chan"

"N-No… M-More importantly, you shouldn't sleep in the bath, Phi-chan."

"…Yes. Thank you."

Philphie who woke up turned her head to thank him.

So as not to see her naked body over the transparent hot water, Lux, after averting his eyes, finally realized the true identity of the sense of discomfort.

"H-Hey, Phi-chan"

"…What?"

"Wasn't there scar on your back? A small one diagonally from the right shoulder—"

"…Maybe there was. I don't really remember though."

With slow movements, Philphie passed one hand onto her back and traced it with a finger.

Right, I'm sure there should have been one.

Lux remembered having heard that it was a scar she had gotten by having fallen down in her childhood before meeting with him.

It was not that deep a scar, but one could tell by sight that it was an old wound.

But, as far as Lux saw a while ago, the scar had neatly disappeared.

Could the wound which left a scar that remained from the time of childhood be healed at this age?

"Lu-chan. Be careful tomorrow."

"E-Errr…?"

Lux came to his senses at Philphie's voice.

"You're going to the ruins, right? I won't also be able to go with you this time due to orders. It's regrettable, but I was told so by Onee-chan."

He had the feeling that slight loneliness was mixed into her usually leisurely tone.

It seemed that she wouldn't be able to sortie together with them as a member of the "Knight Squadron" this time, too.

Although a military power to protect the Fort City was also necessary, it isn't like that problem did not occur to him, but

"Y-Yes. It's all right. I'll come back again properly."

As he promised so, Lux, after having allowed Philphie to get up first, left the bathroom.

— About ten minutes later.

In order to pass time so as to not see Philphie changing her clothes, it seemed to have been a longer, leisurely bath than he thought.

It took a while for Lux, who felt dizzy, to return to his room.

Part 5

And—, the morning of the next day.

Lux and the members of the "Knight Squadron" had gathered to the waiting room of the practice field for the mission.

The objective was the subjugation of a Golem, a large-sized Abyss which wanders around the ruins, and the internal investigation of the sixth ruins "Garden".

Lux and company were exempted from today's lessons, and it was scheduled that they would return before the tomorrow evening

The members who would sortie were about 14 people.

It was planned that after defeating the large-sized Abyss — Golem, a few elites with remaining power among them would enter the ruins.

—No, they intended to do so.

"Well then, I will inform you of a few points about the change of plan of today's strategy execution."

Instructor Raigree said with a slightly bitter face.

As the one supervising the strategy this time, it plainly showed that an unexpected and troublesome incident happened.

"First of all —I will have the foreign student Krulcifer exceptionally participated in this strategy. Her participation to the strategy was strongly requested by the person herself. She asked not to have special treatment and to carry out the mission as a member."

"Eh…?"

"Why did Krulcifer-san—?"

The members of the "Knight Squadron" could not help but leak out voices of surprise.

Lux also felt the same way.

Even though by order of the country Ymir, she should've said that she would not get involved in dangerous missions—

"Please, take care of me. Everyone"

The person concerned, Krulcifer simply got it over with a greeting without explaining her reason for tagging along.

A volunteer to the ruins investigation which they didn't even expect.

Though that alone deserved enough surprise—

"And this person is—"

"Ah, I will personally introduce myself. I cannot afford to cause you trouble, Instructor."

Lux was familiar with that haughty tone, and theatrically exaggerated behavior and expression which coerced others.

"What is the meaning of this? Why is this guy—"

The mutter of Lisha, who could not hide her confusion , could be also heard by Lux beside her.

"My name is Barzeride Kreutzer. I act as assistant lord of the Bergeijk region. I graduated as the top student from a Drag-Knight's military academy two years ago. I thought to offer my cooperation hoping to be of help regarding the duty of this Abyss subjugation as well as the ruins investigation."

"……"

Noise.

Unrest which could not be hidden ran through the " Knight Squadron" which should be used to unusual events and fighting scenes (bravado).

Which wasn't surprising.

No matter how you think about it, an aristocrat with a position to govern a territory — and a former military employee at that suddenly participating in a mission of the "Knight Squadron" was not common.

"Instructor. What the hell does this mean?"

As if speaking for the voices of all the members present there, Lisha took a step forward.

"That is—"

When Raigree who was asked was suddenly at a loss for words,

"*No matter if he is a person from one of the Four Great Nobles and also associated with the army— He is an outsider in this Royal Military Academy. I can't consent that such a person suddenly participated in this important strategy*. Is what you want to say, right? Your Highness the Princess."

"Hmm…"

Lisha frowned at Barzeride who talked with a smile as he saw through her.

"No worries, I don't intend to interrupt or interfere in the mission contents. Help — yes, I just purely intend to help. Rather, shouldn't you be happy with that? After all, I, who gained the seat of third place in the tournament of the Capital, have volunteered for the shield role of delicate (frail) girls like you—"

It was a statement which posed as a gentleman's at first glance.

However, his real intention which treated the female students here with contempt and looked down on them was clearly transmitted.

(What is he planning…?)

Even Lux could not yet understand what Barzeride had in mind.

That alone was uncanny.

"That is what's called "minding your own business", Lord Kreutzer. If someone who didn't participate in the

coordination training is added to the strategy, our actions will be inhibited, too. To begin with, if a “Big Noble” such as you were to be injured, the academy side could not take responsibility, either.”

Even so, Lisha showed a will of refusal to Barzeride who did not changed his strong will.

The other party was from one of the “Four Great Nobles” which had governed a very large territory from the Old Empire era.

Lisha who was the New Kingdom Princess was the only person in this place that could speak as an equal.

But,

“You do not need to worry, Princess Lizsharte. I just stop by the Principal room a while ago and had written a covenant. Even if something was to happen to me, you will not be held responsible.”

Barzeride calmly replied so.

When Lisha turned a fleeting glance to the side, Instructor Raigree gave a small nod as she gave up.

This matter had probably already been settled prior.

“I see. I understand the situation. But, why going that far—?”

When Sharis of the Triad suddenly asked,

“If you’re asking for a reason, there is one. The girl who should become my future wife will be there. In case anything should happen in this dangerous mission—”

Barzeride bragged with a smile.

Small ripples spread among the members of the “ Knight Squadron” that heard that.

“……”

Krulcifer who was thrown gazes looked the other way seeming totally unconcerned.

Was she disgusted or maybe she didn’t want to show a reaction?

Or it might be both, Lux thought.

"—Well then, I will have Lord Kreutzer act only as support in the Abyss subjugation. He will not be involved with the investigation. Understood, everyone?"

When Instructor Raigree said so, there was no further objection.

When the strategy meeting ended, Lux and company changed into dress gear and came out to the practice field.

Afterwards, each of them equipped their Machine Dragons and began to move towards the target location, but—

"Um, Krulcifer-san. Why are you taking part in this mission—?"

Before departure, Lux approached Krulcifer and asked .

Participation in a dangerous mission should've been originally prohibited by order of the country Ymir.

As Lux tried to ask the reason,

"I will tell you in detail later. Right now, it is one of the few opportunities for me to achieve my purpose."

Krulcifer returned so in low voice to Lux while paying attention to the surrounding.

What does she mean by the investigation of the ruins was her purpose?

Is it also somehow related to Barzeride's unnatural participation?

Though Lux had such a speculation,

"And, that has nothing to do with that person. When I forced the matter of my participation in this investigation to the Principal, I do not know where he heard about it from; but he just selfishly came along."

"Those are really cold words, eh, my future wife."

As he had heard their conversation, Barzeride appeared from behind Lux.

Then he turned an affixed-like smile to Krulcifer.

"Hey, can you stop with that future something? I remember having said that you and I are just strangers."

Krulcifer replied in a cold tone.

If the woman butler Alterize who tried to make the engagement saw that, she would fly into rage, but

"Ah, sorry for that. But well, I thought that the result of the duel that will be held tomorrow night has already been decided."

Barzeride returned so with a calm expression.

A duel to decide the establishment or cancellation of the engagement.

About that fight which Krulcifer was the prize, he was probably thinking that his victory was already a matter of fact.

"Still — it's unexpected."

Then, as he turned his face to Lux who was immediately nearby, Barzeride showed a frivolous smile.

"To think that a man who can do nothing other than defending himself is participating in such a mission. Geez, there is nothing more ludicrous than this."

A tone filled with clear provocation and contempt.

Though Lux did not react and remained silent to that clear hostility,

"Could you stop talking about unnecessary things, Lord Kreutzer?"

Lisha suddenly called out in displeasure from behind.

"And I'll say this while I'm at it; Lux has the important mission of going into the ruins with us this time. If you intend to hamper the strategy by saying more nonsense like that, I shall ask you to leave right now. Even if you have some other purpose."

"Sorry for my rudeness, Miss commanding officer."

Barzeride replied in a polite tone and quietly withdrew.

"You're a lifesaver, Lisha-sama."

"Ah, no. Well… Yes, d-don't mind it."

Lux smiled wryly to Lisha who scratched her head slightly embarrassed.

"We will depart soon, Miss commanding officer."

"Tch, interrupting us when we're in a good atmosphere… Well then everyone; equip your Drag-Ride . We are departing!"

Being urged by Krulcifer, Lisha took command.

Finally, the operation commenced.

Part 6

A few minutes after they equipped their Machine Dragons and departed.

All the members arrived at the ruins of the New Kingdom territory about 20 Km away from the Fort City.

A huge white cube which had grown from the ground of a wasteland.

That building called the sixth ruins — “Garden” was endowed with an inorganic, majestic appearance.

『The target has been confirmed. Everyone, get ready for battle!

Lisha who acted as the commanding officer this time urged vigilance through the dragon voice.

Lux also overlooked the ruins while setting up his blade.

“This is the “Garden”…”

There were three ruins, which appeared from about ten years ago, existing within the New Kingdom’s territory.

The ship type “Ark” floating on the open sea.

The “Babel” extending from the land of the border, breaking through the clouds and soaring.

And this “Garden” close to the Fort City.

In the interior where six sides were surrounded by a square wall, there were a forest, lake, cave and the like, it seemed like a structure connoting one small world.

It seemed that Machine Dragons and technology from the past were sleeping at the altar at the that center, but––

"It's really curious. Is this also the first time for you, a Former Prince of the Empire, to be seeing this?"

Sharis wearing a <Wyvern> and flying beside Lux accosted him as such.

It seemed that only third-year students in the "Knight Squadron" had experience with investigation.

"I have worked as a guard, guarding the surroundings due to odd jobs—, but this is my first time seeing it this close."

"I see. In this place, only the third-year students who came along have experience in investigations. You have probably heard about it in the prior strategy meeting, but if there is anything, you can ask me without reserve."

"Understood."

When Lux nodded,

『Hey. Be careful, everyone! Abyss confirmed ahead!

Soon after, Lisha urged everyone to be cautious.

At a closer look, a huge lump appeared from the shades of the "Garden" where there were several castles.

"That's—!"

Reflected in the eyes of the Drag- Ride clad in Lux was a giant metal soldier whose half body was covered with rock scales.

It was a kind of Abyss commonly known as Golem.

A large-sized Abyss which boasted of its big frame and superhuman strength.

Although it had weaknesses such as its slow pace and its monotonous attacks, it possessed a hard, sturdy metal body; it was proud of its power in which a single blow delivered from its weight was impossible to defend against and to which a fatal wound was unavoidable.

Escape would be easy for a competent Drag-Knight, but the subjugation was a nearly impossible formidable obstacle.

The only consolation was that because it was not an active kind for an Abyss, if one did not approach carelessly, there was a very small risk of being attacked; but since it had appeared, it could not be left alone forever.

"It looks like it will be quite worth defeating it, Lux"

Even so, Lisha calmly muttered while looking at the target.

The distance between the Knight Squadron's platoon and the Golem was about 500 Mel by eye measurement.

It had been established by past battles that the location of its core was in the chest, but its outer shell would probably not be pierced with half-hearted long-range shooting.

"Errr, in the prior strategy, if I'm not mistaken —"

Ordinary long-range shooting wouldn't be able to make even a dent on it.

First attract the enemy's attention with the high mobility of a <Wyvern>, then attack its chest with < Wyverns>' Breath Guns loaded at full power from the ground and continue shaving its shell until the core is exposed.

The strategy which had been planned on the previous day should be something like this, but—

"It will take too much time."

"Eh?"

As Lux reacted to that mutter, Krulcifer turned her face to Lisha.

"Can you leave the diversion and attack to me? It will be faster that way."

"W-Wait a minute! Do you intend to do it alone!?"

Lisha hurriedly tried to stop Krulcifer's proposal, but she was not shaken at all.

"It is possible with my <Fafnir>. If there is not any problem, then let me go."

"It's certainly true, but—"

"Then — I will start moving."

The moment when Lisha was at a loss for a rebuttal, Krulcifer moved.

"—!"

Immediately after, not only Lux who tried to call out to her, but the members of the "Knight Squadron" also gasped.

<Fafnir> accelerated leaving behind all the people present in an instant.

(Fast…!)

A speed to the extent that even Lux who possessed a superhuman kinetic vision and reading lost sight of her figure.

With its extraordinary mobility, <Fafnir> closed in upon the Golem in an instant.

Ooooooooh…

The Golem which reacted to <Fafnir>'s approach issued a strange noise from its head and let its strong arm howl

It pulled (wielded) its fist like a thick huge rock and let out a blow describing an arc.

"Watch out!"

The fist approached from behind <Fafnir> as it came too close.

A female student reflexively shouted at the blow released from a blind spot.

—But,

"Eh…?"

The moment when it looked as if the fist hit, <Fafnir> evaded it without even looking behind.

A minimum movement without too much waste considering it immediately moved after sensing the presence.

It set up a sniper rifle and fired light bullets while coolly receiving the sudden gust which arose.

Several shots impacted on the Golem's opened underarm and bluish white lights burst.

Guh…! Ooooooooh!

The Abyss raised a groan and launched an attack with the other arm, but Krulcifer did not move.

"Krulcifer-san! Dodge it!"

Lux raised his voice this time, but Krulcifer still floating in mid-air did not move an inch.

But, a strange thing happened again.

Whether it used up all its strength or its posture was broken by the shooting earlier, the Golem's fist stopped exactly just before hitting Krulcifer.

"…Eh?"

Using that opening, Krulcifer once again pulled the trigger.

フリージング・カノン

《凍息投射》

「じゃあ、
――行動を開始するわ」

そして――神装

ワイズ・ブラッド

《財禍の叡智》

The precise shooting which could also be called divine feat which she showed in the mock battle again the temporary instructors before.

But, even if it had been hit by an attack of several shots , the Golem did not move an inch.

“I’ll go, too. As expected, it can’t be defeated with just a rifle. We have to cooperate—”

I don’t know why, but Krulcifer hurried ahead.

As Lux who intuitively felt so was going to back her up,

『You do not need to come.

Through the dragon voice, Krulcifer’s voice could be heard for all of the members of the Squadron.

『It looks like I will soon defeat this enemy.

“Eh—?”

The other members, at the same time they blankly opened their mouths, understood her reply.

Guh, …Ooooooooooooooh!

At first glance, the movement of both arms of the Golem almost stopped.

“Looks like it.”

Lisha who had worn the <Chimeric Wyvern> took a breath as she saw it.

It had been frozen.

The mechanical giant soldier covered with thick rock skin.

The joints of both elbows and wrists were frozen and its movements were sealed.

“That is <Fafnir>’s special armament — the <Freezing Canon>. It basically has the same high efficiency of a sniper rifle, but that armament holds the ability to freeze the parts shot. It’s a troublesome weapon which, if you defend, would freeze you together with the part used to defend. In the case of a mock battle with her, you can’t help but avoid her attacks.”

“... Amazing.”

While listening to Lisha's explanation, Lux leaked a voice of admiration.

She said to avoid, but it was probably a level where it might be said it was impossible to evade all the precise shootings of that <Fafnir>.

"By the way, <Fafnir>'s Divine Raiment seems to be the ability of future foresight called <Wise Blood>. It was probably thanks to that, that she was able to one-sidedly attack while dodging the enemy's attack earlier."

"That was <Fafnir>'s Divine Raiment—"

A Divine Raiment of offense and defense which foresaw an opponent's attack and aimed at their opening.

Moreover, Krulcifer had precisely frozen only the joints of the Golem.

With that — the enemy could no longer fight back.

As its chest was finally also frozen, the Golem began to behave violently as it struggled, but because of its own weight and muscular strength, the self-destruction of its joints began.

『Krulcifer, leave the rest to us. I'll finish it off with long-range shooting.

When Lisha was going to call out to Krulcifer with the dragon voice,

Guoh… Aaaaaaaaaaaaaah!

The Golem with neither mouth nor eyes raised a muffled roar.

At the same time, its huge head cracked opened like a cotyledon which buds.

"……!?"

The moment when Krulcifer raised her guard, a straight flash was released from the huge jewel which was there.

It would be meaningless if she didn't consciously activate the precognition ability which is her Divine Raiment.

"Krulcifer! Deploy a barrier!"

Before Lisha had finished shouting, a line of light flew to <Fafnir> and an explosion occurred.

Boom!

With a roaring sound, the storm and impact reached up to Lux and the others who were away.

“Krulcifer-san!”

Lux could not help but raise his voice, and headed to her rescue with his <Wyvern>.

But,

“I remember having said that you do not need to come . Lux-kun.”

Suddenly, Krulcifer’s cool voice tickly struck Lux’s ears

Soon after, a needle-like shooting released from < Fafnir>’s <Freezing Canon> pierced the Golem’s frozen chest.

“Eh…?”

The moment when the white smoke which was obscuring the field of vision cleared up, it was reflected on Lux's eyes.

She was unhurt.

On the front of <Fafnir>, seven octagonal shields tinged with a bluish-while light were unfolded.

"That's another special armament of <Fafnir>, <Auto Shield>."

Such explanation flew from Lisha from behind.

"A defense type armament which automatically protects the main body in response to an enemy's attack. It is said to be several times harder than an ordinary barrier."

An armament which symbolized solid scales symbolizing the gigantic dragon Fafnir.

Lux couldn't help but feel admiration before her ability to easily use up the two special armaments.

Precise shooting impossible to defend, high-speed mobility and moreover an impregnable defensive barrier.

Krulcifer who boasted of a flawless strength overwhelmed the Abyss all alone.

"But, to be able to manage the Divine Raiment and the special armaments to such extent, is related to Krulcifer's aptitude value."

"Aptitude value, huh?"

"Yes. Her Machine Dragon aptitude value is exceptionally high even among the female students of this academy. Normally, it's an unbelievable numerical value. In such a meaning, you're quite unnatural, too."

Saying so, Lisha turned her gaze to Lux.

"That's—"

When Lux raised his voice,

Gu… Ooooaaaaah!

The Golem whose chest was torn by <Fafnir>'s rapid-fire and core crushed collapsed.

The frozen joints broke to pieces with a roaring sound and dust soared highly.

"She did it!"

"You're amazing, Krulcifer-san!"

As they were released from the tension, the female students of the "Knight Squadron" raised cheers.

"……"

But, Krulcifer, in contrast to her comrades in high spirits, was staring at the outer wall of the "Garden" with an expression as if brooding over something.

『Eeih, be quiet! We're still in the middle of the plan.

Lisha shouted at the unit by dragon voice as to chide them.

"Well then — we'll get down to the ruins like this."

At that moment, Krulcifer plainly declared so.

『W-Wait, Krulcifer!? It should have been planned that it will be the members of the Triad, Lux and I to investigate the ruins!

The investigation of ruins was also accompanied with the danger of the appearance of a new Abyss.

Therefore, a few elites would penetrate the ruins and a powerful person would also be left outside and prepared just in case something unexpected happened.

In such a meaning, the members who had not fought yet and still had spare energy left should participate in the investigation, but—

"I can still fight. So, you don't mind, right?"

"Krulcifer, san…?"

(Is she by any chance… impatient?)

Lux was perplexed at Krulcifer's behavior which was calm at first glance, but somehow hard-pressed.

As it is, they started moving to get down to the " Garden".

Something doesn't feel right.

When Lux thought so,

"Kukuku. As expected of my future wife. That's a splendid skill — but"

In the rear, Barzeride who came along wearing a general-purpose type <Wyrm> suddenly laughed.

When Lux had his attention attracted by his voice for an instant,

『Everyone! Be careful — something is coming!

Tillfarr who was on land raised a voice of warning.

『Signs of an enemy confirmed by radar. It's a new type of Abyss.

The moment when Nokuto with her <Drake> added that, it could be seen.

"…!? W-What is that? …!"

A Knight Squadron's girl wearing a <Wyvern> leaked a small scream

"Don't tell me…!"

In the sky where the cloud of dust had cleared up, a strange-looking demon was floating.

A big frame which easily surpassed a standing big bear's, reddish brown skin and huge jet black wings.

It was a monster which let its dagger-like fangs peep out all together in a line and savagely twisted its dark red mouth.

It leaked a smog-like purple breath, occasionally opened wide its bloodshot eyes and licked its lips.

It showed no sign of hiding at all.

But, it slowly and surely shortened the distance to the Knight Squadron.

"If I'm not mistaken, that's—"

"A Diabolos… huh!"

Lisha, frowning, cried.

Lux had also never seen it until now, but he had already read about it in the ruins' investigation book.

A brutal medium-sized Abyss strong enough to able to destroy a small town.

It was a type of Abyss among the flying kinds just like the Gargoyle which he had fought before, but it was an existence several times more dangerous than the Gargoyle.

Probably because it rarely appeared, there were no details written about it even in the books in the library of the Capital.

But, by confronting it like this, they were naturally aware of how dangerous it was.

It was said that this was a creature which must not exist in this world.

"—Gieeaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaah!"

Raising a growl-like scream, the Abyss's eyes shone.

When most of the members reflexively shrank their bodies, the Diabolos kicked the sky.

"Shaaaaaaaaa!"

It caused a gust which burst the atmosphere and with an explosive speed, swooped down on Nokuto who was wearing a <Drake> down below.

"—!?"

Although Lisha and the others who were in front of the ruins also reacted, they could not catch up.

So as to mow the girl's face which revealed despair, its stout arm was keenly swung down.

I won't make it in time!

When anyone who was there thought so and was about to cover their eyes, a sharp metallic sound resounded in the sky.

"Kuh…!?"

Using his large blade as a shield, Lux stood in between the Diabolos and Nokuto.

"Lux…san!?"

"It's fine— so get away!"

Nokuto, realizing that she would get in Lux's way, hurriedly jumped back.

A tremendous weight as if being hit by an iron stake.

Lux defended against the blow let out by the demon with perfect timing and position; that blow had a power to the extent that the blade got cracked.

Moreover — that alone could not completely stop it.

Lux tried to crush it with an inhuman, herculean strength from the position where he stopped the blow.

The small fissures on the blade turned into a crack with cracking sounds.

(At this rate — it'll break!)

When Lux perceived danger,

Boom!

A light beam emitted from the canon of the <Chimeric Wyvern> was fired at the Diabolos's flank.

"Guaaaaaaah!"

The Diabolos which perceived it struck Lux's < Wyvern> with its other arm, leapt back using the recoil and avoided the canon.

At the same time, it sneaked behind Sharis who came close in order to help Nokuto.

"What…!?"

Sharis, turning around, slashed at it with her blade — but, far from being avoided, it had been caught by the Diabolos's right hand.

"Kuh—!?"

Her weapon caught, Sharis's judgment suddenly became dull.

The demon's left arm which was thrust out using that opening was frozen.

"Guooooooah!"

Krulcifer's <Freezing Canon>. Using that opportunity when the demon's attack was stopped, Sharis abandoned her caught sword to get out of the Abyss's range.

When the Diabolos also took distance at the same time, deep sighs leaked out from the Knight Squadron's members.

A face-off after taking distance.

In this unpredictable situation, the sound of unsheathing (a sword) could be heard suddenly from behind.

"—Well then, it's my turn soon, I guess."

The owner of that leisurely voice was Barzeride who tagged along.

Slightly behind from Lux and the others, he cancelled the armor of his <Wyrm> and equipped a new Machine Dragon which he summoned.

His body changed into a Drag-Knight with thick armor dyed in ultramarine like midnight black.

"That's—"

All the people present, while also being cautious of the Abyss, turned their looks towards his Machine Dragon.

Divine Drag-Ride <Aži Dahāka>。

Barzeride's Divine Drag-Ride which could only be used against high rank opponents even in mock battles in the Capital.

It was the battle figure of the man called "Title Holder of the Kingdom".

"Fuhahahahaha!"

At that moment, Barzeride's loud laughter resounded, and the canons connected to both his shoulders moved.

<Aži Dahāka>'s special armament already seen in the tournament, <Devil's Glow>.

The two muzzles were charged with purple light and suddenly spouted flames.

The two flash of light attacked aiming at the Diabolos — but, the enemy evaded the attack by a hairbreadth escaping into the sky.

"Kyaah…!?"

All the members of the "Knight Squadron" held their breath at his attack. They had reflectively dodged it, but <Aži Dahāka>'s shelling had grazed the members of the "Knight Squadron".

But, Barzeride whose shelling was evaded still turned a composed smile to Lux.

"How's that, fallen Prince? Do you want to play a game with me? About which of us will defeat that Abyss first—. If you can defeat it before me, I'll make it you

guys victory at this point in time and withdraw that duel 's promise."

"Quit the joke, Barzeride."

Before Lux could answer, Lisha cut in with an uncanny look.

"This isn't hunting for fun! If you intend to do more unnecessary things than this, I'll first beat you up here."

However, Barzeride simply ignored Lisha's anger and continued.

"Aren't you confident? Lux Acadia."

"Kuh…!"

In contrast, Lux ground his teeth as he heard that.

Though Barzeride was probably serious, the problem was not there.

—This man fired at a distance which also involved the members of the "Knight Squadron" around in the shelling.

If by chance something was to happen, this man for sure — intended to cover it up as an “accident”.

“You—”

At this time when Lux’s voice trembled in anger,

“Would you please stop fooling around?”

Krulcifer who came back to his side broke in with an unusually serious voice.

“Kuku, that’s quite a cold attitude, my future wife. But , I’ll allow that much. That’s why you’re worth being conquered.”

<Aži Dahāka>’s armor bowl softly tapped on <Fafnir> ’s shoulder.

After calmly shaking it off, Krulcifer took a deep breath,

“I will dispose of the enemy earlier than you. In that case, there is no problem, right?”

She declared so with a cool expression.

"Ooh, how promising. So, you still have spare energy left, huh."

"Krulcifer! Don't act rashly! Retreat temporarily and fix your posture!"

Lisha ignored Barzeride's statement and said so.

But,

"It's all right. I will not cause you trouble with my rash actions this time. Besides — time is precious."

With an expression which repressed her feelings Krulcifer set up the special armament <Freezing Canon>.

And, she flew towards the Diabolos which was far away and was watching the situation.

Lux was surprised by the action of Krulcifer who was good at long-range shooting.

"Krulcifer-san!"

It was probably in order to draw away Barzeride's attention and not let the others become involved.

Certainly, Krulcifer was the owner of an outstanding ability even among the Knight Squadron's members, but that Diabolos was not an ordinary Abyss.

"This time for sure — I will shoot it down."

At the same time as she approached the Abyss, she set up the <Freezing Canon> and aimed at it.

Since she could use the Divine Raiment future foresight in offense and defense at point-blank range, Krulcifer should have the advantage.

Or at least, it should like that.

"…!? Why did <Fafnir>'s foresight—?"

The moment of opening hostilities, agitation ran through Krulcifer's profile and she stopped moving.

Not overlooking that opening which suddenly appeared, the Diabolos spouted hellish flames.

"Guaaaaaaaaaaaaah!"

"____"

Dispelling the cold of the <Freezing Canon> shot reflexively, scorching raging flames approached Krulcifer .

“Watch out!”

Lux who rushed at once at max power thrust Krulcifer away.

“Ushaaaaaaaa!”

Although Lux did not end up being rolled into the flames, it directly received the fist of the Diabolos which drew near as it followed.

“Guh…!”

He issued a muffled groan and was knocked down on to the ground as such.

“Lux!”

As the same time that Lisha and the remaining Knight Squadron’s members shouted, they poured concentrated fire on the Diabolos.

But, that barrage of more than ten shots was all dodged with smooth flight movements.

"Kuuh…!"

When all the members over there were astonished at the enemy more formidable than expected—

"—Good grief, so my help is necessary after all."

From Barzeride's <Aži Dahāka> which was on the ground, a shelling of <Devil's Glow> was released.

As if it was natural, the Diabolos dodged it with mobility which did not match its big frame — but,

"Guaah!?"

On its chest, a halberd was sticking out as if it grew.

"…Eh?"

Lux and Krulcifer who saw it, no, all the members present were dumbfounded.

For a moment, no one had noticed that that halberd was a close-range weapon thrown by <Aži Dahāka>.

Among the Drag-Rides' weapons, the halberd was a heavyweight class weapon. Besides the abnormality of Barzeride with <Aži Dahāka> which threw it at the speed like an arrow, the problem was the applied process .

The Abyss was in the sky with no obstacles around.

Even if Barzeride could predict that the Abyss would dodge, he shouldn't be able to predict where it would dodge to.

It was a blow as if he foresaw the future like <Fafnir>'s Divine Raiment, <Wise Blood>.

"Guru…. Aaaaah!?"

Maybe because it was fatal wound which reached its core, the Diabolos suddenly stopped moving; and while its whole body went into convulsions, it began to spout blue blood.

"This game — it's my victory, right? Fallen Prince."

Barzeride who saw that looked at Lux and Krulcifer and contentedly smiled.

But Lux did not care about such a thing now.

"…Why? I—"

Although ostensibly uttering calm voice as usual,

But, Krulcifer was confused to the extent that Lux had never seen before.

This was probably because the future foresight by <Fafnir>'s Divine Raiment, <Wise Blood> suddenly became impossible to use.

Moreover, the Abyss had been shot down by <Aži Dahāka> operated by that Barzeride.

The girl's calm and perfect face had been distorted with unrest by these two unlikely events.

"Kuhahahaha! As expected, there is nobody who can match me, Lux Acadia."

Barzeride's shrill laughter resounded around.

He's certainly strong.

He possessed strength outstanding enough to be called "Title Holder of the Kingdom", Lux thought

However,

(Something doesn't feel right—)

When Lux had his attention attracted by that sense of discomfort for a moment,

"Don't relax yet!"

Lisha's voice could be heard from a distant place.

"Gu, aaaaaaaaaaah…!"

The Diabolos which suffered a fatal wound, vomited blood and fainted in agony.

Its chest with a hole opened that was gaping wide suddenly swelled to more than double its size.

"…!? Leave quickly!"

The Knight Squadron's members who saw that hurriedly shouted.

『Everyone, deploy your barrier at max power!

Immediately after Lisha's shout was heard through dragon voice once again,

red cracks appeared on the Abyss's whole body and it was tinged with light.

Among the Abysses, several kinds of individuals who self-blasted had been confirmed.

When all the members took a defensive posture, Lux noticed that something was strange about Krulcifer who was beside him.

"Why doesn't it move? My <Fafnir>—"

Next to Lux, Krulcifer's airframe began to shake with a rattling sound.

Despite the impending danger approaching, the shield of the special armament <Auto Shield> on the contrary dropped from around <Fafnir>.

The control confusion due to the user's exhaustion — the rampage began.

"Krulcifer-san!?"

Immediately after, the Abyss's body exploded with a flash.

A scorching torrent born with a roar swallowed everything along with screams.

With the blast and impact, it was impossible to breathe .

Enduring a pain as if his lungs and heart would be crushed, Lux desperately embraced the dumbfounded Krulcifer, thus becoming her shield.

Then, he lost consciousness.

Part 7

The sound of rainfall could be heard.

What he recalled was the memories of more than five years ago.

A carriage which broke had rolled down the cliff along the route where a forest was close by.

Whether the ground collapsed or the wheels came out, or it slid due to rain, the cause was unknown.

Although it was said that it was cliff, it was not so high . It was just a height of about four Mel from the route above the cliff.

But, the coachman and horses had already died by the impact of the fall.

There were only two survivors; a lady dressed in a plain dress — Lux's mother was also bleeding from the head, but she was still breathing.

"Please! Please, help us! We are from the Imperial Family! We are the Acadia people living in the Phillend territory!"

While holding his arm broken at the time of the fall, he desperately shouted.

It was an incident of two years ago that Lux's mother's side family was alienated by the Imperial Family and banished from the Imperial Court.

After his mother's father — that is, Lux's grandfather stated a candid advice for imperial politics, there seemed to have been a dispute there, and his grandfather was sent to prison for the crime of defamation and Lux's family was treated coldly.

After being banished from the Imperial Court, they had been living modestly on the outskirts of the Capital, but this accident occurred when they went for an outing from the house.

"Please! We will reward you. If I don't take her to a doctor as soon as possible, my mother will—"

A few carriages were coming and going on the route above the cliff.

The sound of rainfall was not strong. Though there was also fog, his cry for help should reach there.

But, no one responded to Lux's voice.

"Please! Somebody! —!?"

What came down instead of a response were stones.

Blood flowed from Lux's forehead and half of his silver hair and face were dyed red.

Looking up ahead, despair was standing.

"Shut up! You damn kid!"

"That's right! Do you know what you royalty and nobles have done to us!?"

"Even if we won't help you guys who have been banished from the Imperial Court, we won't be accused of crime! Just drop dead like that, you bastard!"

The figures of people filled with hatred and raising voices of resentment.

The day when Lux learned that reality for the first time .

All the fights began.

Part 8

"Ngh… Hum…"

Lux woke up with an anguished groan.

His body became stiff when he tried to move, due to the dull pain as if his whole body was fractured.

"…!? That's right, everyone is—!"

Recalling about what had happen just a while ago, Lux forcibly got up.

Then—

"Eh…?"

Lux's surrounding was covered with a grass thicket which grew in abundance, rugged big rocks, a lake which was visible from the gap in the trees and a ceiling which illuminated the ground with a soft light.

It was a mysterious place as if he lost his way in an uncivilized forest.

"Where the hell is this place…?"

"Probably — inside the sixth ruins "Garden"."

"Uwaaah!?"

At the voice which he suddenly heard from behind, Lux's body shook in surprise.

When he looked back, Krulcifer wearing dress gear like Lux was standing; her Sword Device hung to the belt of her waist.

"I understand how you feel, but do not shout that much. I have not grasped the situation yet, so it is dangerous."

"Ah, sorry…"

At her usual very calm, and composed expression, Lux was a little relieved.

She was calm now unlike the Krulcifer of a little a while ago.

"What on earth happened? If I remember correctly, the Abyss exploded and—"

"Immediately after the Garden shone, it looks like the people and things around were drawn to inside here. It's also only a little while ago that I woke up."

Saying so with a sigh, Krulcifer sat down beside him.

"Thanks to you protecting me, it looks like I'm all right . Thank you."

"Ah, no. I'm glad that Krulcifer-san is safe."

As Lux unintentionally looked, there was a bag containing tools for investigation at the place where he was sleeping.

I thought that he had lost it during the battle, but it seemed that luckily this had also been drawn to inside the ruins.

"Beside us, it seems that several members of the " Knight Squadron" were also sucked in, but other than that, I don't know the rest of the details."

"If I'm not mistaken, when we entered the ruins, our course of actions was already decided, right?"

Lux took out a memo of the strategy operation from his bag.

The "Garden" had a system such that the gate opened and closed by a cycle of fixed times.

There were access gates in each wall side of the six faces of the cube, and at the same time as the opening and shutting, things from outside were drawn in, and things inside were ejected.

"In case the invasion to the inside of the "Garden" succeeded, the first move is aiming for the altar in the center. Afterwards, carry out the investigation in the altar for about two hours max and then move to the gate of the inner wall after completion. Wait for the opening and closing time and return outside. It will be like this if we proceed as planned, eh."

Krulcifer who seemed to have memorized the strategy contents confirmed as she read smoothly.

"Yes. But—, now…"

An unexpected incident had already occurred and the situation was different from the usual investigation.

It was a state of emergency where they were attacked by an unexpected Abyss and the members were also scattered.

Under the present conditions where they didn't even know how many other members were drawn in, the Knight Squadron's members' safety should be top priority.

"Well then — let's head to the altar at the center tomorrow. Everyone should surely gather there, too."

Krulcifer calmly muttered.

"Is your body all right, Lux-kun?"

"Y-Yes, well—. Not that, is it okay!?"

"What do you mean?"

Being asked so with a serious look, Lux hesitated.

Then, he alternately looked at the memo in his hand and Krulcifer's face in panic.

If they were in perfect condition, it would be reasonable to proceed with the ruins investigation like this.

But, in case that there were casualties or that the members' fatigue was profound, they should cancel the investigation and a judgment about withdrawing should be required, too.

In that case, they should camp near the gate of the inner wall from the start without going to the altar which was the center, and wait there to escape by the opening and closing of the ruins.

In other words, in this case—

"We shouldn't overdo it. Um — we also have that duel tomorrow night… Even your body is tired, isn't it, Krulcifer-san…?"

<Fafnir>'s rampage shown earlier.

The failure of Krulcifer who is always calm and composed.

What Krulcifer desired should be the cancellation of the engagement plan selfishly forced on her.

For that, preserving her strength by not overdoing it in this mission and then winning the duel against Barzeride and Alterize should be the ideal scenario.

And yet, Krulcifer was trying to forcibly defeat the Abyss a while ago.

Though Lux felt uneasy at that behavior that was too much unlike her,

"It's all right. At that time, I was just a little tired, and I 'm not injured. What about you?"

As she turned her usual calm voice and look to him, he wasn't able to say the words he should say.

"I'm also all right, but… —Ah."

While touching his body, Lux noticed,

The blade of the <Wyvern>'s Sword Device which was hanging onto his waist lost its light.

This state showed that the corresponding machine was in a “serious damage” state.

Like this, he could not even summon it let alone wearing it as armor.

<Bahamut>’s black sword was fine, but since he couldn’t use it just like that, it would probably be the last resort.

“I wonder if it is broken. It’s because you protected me , huh.”

“N-No, we were both safe, so we’re pretty lucky.”

Considering that situation, that much was helpful enough.

However — when thinking about tomorrow’s duel, it was also a troubling problem.

“If you want, you can just wait in front of the gate without overdoing it here. I’ll go alone.”

Krulcifer said not in a sarcastic or provocative tone, but in an earnest one.

That instead stimulated Lux's uneasiness.

"N-No—. I'll also go! I can't let you go alone, Krulcifer-san!"

"…Thank you."

To Lux who expressed his strong will, Krulcifer revealed a relieved smile.

The moment when Lux's heart skipped a bit at Krulcifer's slightly feverish gaze,

"By the way, Lux-kun. You — are you good at cooking outdoors?"

"Eh…?"

Krulcifer suddenly said that and looked up at the ceiling of the wild wall.

"I do not know the theory behind it, but in this " Garden", the system seems to be such that it will become dark in conjunction with outside time. At this rate, it will be night soon."

"E-Errr, um—"

"In the case that we are in the "Garden", camping goods such as firewood can be procured locally. This was also written, right?"

"Ah, yes…"

To Krulcifer who had suddenly returned to her usual self, Lux did not know what to say.

"And — the securing of drinking water is necessary, too. The points (locations) of drinkable spring water should have been sketched on the drawn map from past investigations, so can you please give it to me, too?"

"Ah, I understand that, but Krulcifer-san is…"

"I will watch over the baggage near this vicinity. I' am counting on you, Lux-kun."

"……"

She had asserted like so with an extremely calm face.

In a peremptory tone…

"T-Then, I'll be right back, so be careful, too, Krulcifer-san—"

"Lux-kun, you are a man after all. How reliable."

When she earnestly said so, he could no longer complain.

(B-But well, it somehow feels like it's been a long time since Krulcifer-san behaves like herself.)

He was still feeling pain here and there, but since he had shown off, he could not pull back.

That's what being a man is, Lux thought.

(I feel like I have been beautifully led around by Krulcifer-san, but…)

Lux, enduring fatigue and dull pain, collected firewood and drinking water and decided to take a rest that day.

……

There was no sun in the "Garden".

Nonetheless, the light of the ceiling disappeared just as if the day had set, and nature and the neighborhood were wrapped in azure darkness.

They made a small bonfire at the waterside and built a simple tent stretching a cloth on the side of rocks and trees.

As they nibbled the dried meat and rye bread which were in the bag and finished their simple dinner, they were finally able to settle down.

“Speaking of which, I wonder if everyone is safe…”

Lux anxiously muttered so.

He presumed that Lisha and the others who were near had probably also been drawn inside the ruins, but he did not know.

“If there was <Drake> user we would be able to detect the position of biological reactions and Machine Dragons .Though that is also impossible in this situation.”

“Which means, we can only advance to the altar at the center. If we’re lucky, we might be able to join them there __”

“……”

As silence filled the neighborhood, Lux was thinking.

About the fact that Krulcifer did not seem to have an ordinary relation with the Einvolk House.

About the reason why she was so obsessed with this ruins investigation.

And—

"We should decide soon about the lookout and sleeping order."

As if sliding into Lux's thinking, Krulcifer muttered.

Fortunately, there were no ferocious carnivores inside the "Garden", so they didn't have to worry about being attacked by a beast.

But, there was also the possibility that an Abyss might appear in the "Garden", so as expected they should avoid relaxing their vigilance openly.

"T-Then, I'll look out first."

When Lux proposed so, Krulcifer quietly nodded,

"Understood. After a little time has passed, please wake me up."

As she lied down on the sheet which was a simple tent
,

"Don't attack me, okay?"

"I-I won't do something like that!?"

To Krulcifer's teasing voice, Lux unintentionally shouted.

"I see… But just to note, you have a criminal record."

"Like I said, that was a misunderstanding!? That I've broken into the bath before was because—"

"Yes, I know. Judging from how you panicked, you surely will not do anything. Well then, good night."

"……"

As usual, he was played with.

When Krulcifer turned her back on Lux, she began to leak a sleeper's breathing (the breathing of a person sleeping) calmly after a while.

"Ruins, huh…"

After sighing once, Lux looked up at the dark space.

An existence which should also be called the treasure warehouse of the world that brought about a tremendous development due to Drag-Rides and ancient documents.

The fight to solve its mysteries was accelerating as time passed.

It appeared to be what Fugil had said; Lux was also in possession of the golden horn which could summon the Abysses, but there was no reaction so far.

Was the key to reaching the ruins' depths that Airi who, deciphered ancient documents, was talking about was something different?

And on the night of the next day, a duel with Barzeride was waiting.

"It would be good if nothing happens…"

Towards the ceiling of the Garden where the sky could not be seen, it looked like invisible dark clouds were hanging over.

Part 9

One night passed in the "Garden" — the next day

Lux also seemed to have fallen asleep before he was aware, and when he woke up, Krulcifer was sitting in front of the bonfire.

It looked like Lux himself was unexpectedly quite exhausted.

After he had the same meal as yesterday, they began to walk to the place called the "altar" at the center.

They did not use Machine Dragons to move because Lux's <Wyvern> had been greatly damaged.

Though <Bahamut> and <Fafnir> were available, now when fatigue still remained, there was the need to preserve them in case of emergencies.

In this sense, it was a situation where they couldn't let their guard down even for a moment.

"It looks like it is going to rain."

Krulcifer who was walking in front while holding up her hand to her face said.

"It looks like it is going to rain."

"Rain? Does it even rain in this place?"

"Based on past records, it looks like it. It seems that the structure has not yet been clarified though—. Let's hurry."

Krulcifer said so and accelerated her pace.

But immediately after, her slender body suddenly staggered (slanted) a bit.

"Watch out!"

When Lux hurriedly supported her body, it was tinged with a high fever.

“Krulcifer-san. Don’t tell me that’s—”

The reason why she left the physical work to Lux for last night’s camping.

If Lux’s prediction proved right, they should return as soon as possible.

“…I am all right. I also said so yesterday, right? Thank you for helping me.”

But even so, Krulcifer began to walk looking only forward.

A small amount of sweat oozed on the nape of her neck.

The inside of the “Garden” was by no means hot.

Lux was convinced that her leg was injured.

“It’s just a little twisted. It’s not a big deal.”

"As expected, shouldn't we go back? I'll take you until the gate of the inner wall with <Bahamut>, so if we just stay still there—"

"I am sorry."

As she painfully cast her eyes down, Krulcifer still did not stop walking.

"I must by all means go. This is one of a few chances I have, so—"

"…I understand."

Therefore, Lux also decided to go on.

"In return, let me walk in front."

As he said only that, Krulcifer also nodded slightly.

For a while, the two people silently advanced.

"Hey, Krulcifer-san."

"…What is it?"

As if to loosen the awkward atmosphere, Lux called out to her.

“Krulcifer-san, why were you looking for the “Black Hero”?”

At Lux’s question, Krulcifer remained silent for a short while.

“For the same reason that I am heading to the altar now. There is something I would like to know by all means.”

She lowered her gaze and softly muttered.

“Have you heard from anyone that my Machine Dragon aptitude value is strangely high? Normally, no matter how rash human acts, there is a limit for the continuous operation of a Drag-Ride. But—”

“But?”

“If the legend of the “Black Hero” is true, if he really annihilated the imperial army in one night, then that Drag-Knight has almost no limit. Surely just like me — something like that.”

"……"

Unable to say anything at Krulcifer's meaningful words, Lux continued walking.

And after about ten minutes,

"This place is, um—"

Krulcifer and Lux had finally arrived at the altar at the center.

Around a circular floor, white columns stood in a row and a silver gem placed on the central platform was tinged with a mysterious light.

A strange structure (Object) which they seemed to be familiar with and unlike any other thing.

It (Object) which was made of the same white metal as the walls of the "Garden" was the altar.

"It looks like we are the first to arrive, huh…"

Krulcifer quietly approached that jewel while looking around.

"Well then, we will wait for everyone here—"

When Lux proposed so,

『Ga, gagaga…

A strange sound could be suddenly heard.

"……!?"

Though Lux and Krulcifer placed their hands on their Sword Devices to their waists at once,

"An Abyss… it doesn't look like it!? This voice is — a person's!?"

『Ga, gagaga…! Existence of the <key> recognized. Performing special code unlock. If there is no problem, begin the transfer.

A voice which directly resounded within the brain like the dragon voice was suddenly audible.

"This sound!? Is it by any chance from this altar—!?"

At that moment, the pattern depicted on the floor emitted a dazzling light.

"This—!?"

They reflexively closed their eyes — when they opened them, all the scenery had changed.

"—It looks like we were transferred to the inside."

An inorganic corridor surrounded by bluish-white metallic plates and where innumerable rubble rolled.

It was the inside of the altar that they had heard about.

"This place, is my…"

When Lux was surprised at the unfamiliar scenery, Krulcifer moved as if she was in a hurry.

And, when she put her hand on a strange box-shaped object, a white light ran.

『Confirming key's authentication. By level authority, removing lock to the second layer management room.

"The object, talked…!?"

To that mysterious occurrence, Lux opened his eyes wide in surprise.

The strange voice which was emitted from the object.

Has it reacted to Krulcifer?

"So…I was right after all, huh."

With a small sigh, Krulcifer's hand separated from the object.

And then she slowly walked towards a shelf which was in the side of wall side of the room.

"Krulcifer-san!? That place—"

Numerous <Boxes> were placed on the shelf.

Inside the ruins, boxes which stored Machine Dragons' parts and ancient documents — <Box> existed.

However, because the seams were firm and couldn't be opened, originally there should be no other method of opening it other than bringing back the entire box with a Machine Dragon, and then taking time to break it, but…

"……"

『Confirming key's authentication. By level authority, removing lock to the second layer management room.

Krulcifer, with a serious look, softly held up her hand to the edge of a Box and moved a finger as if softly stroking the space.

"Eh…!?"

With only that, the box, which should not open, completely opened with a small sound.

Inside of it, there were numerous general-purpose Machine Dragons' armaments and parts, and a bunch of papers written in ancient characters.

Krulcifer looked over the pages of the ancient document as she turned them.

Each time she shook her head while saying "that's not it…"; she walked to the doors at the back.

The metal walls lying on top of one another automatically opened by her only touching them.

Ahead of that, there was a staircase which continued further underground.

"I still don't know. Deeper… I should search deeper. ––!"

While muttering, the moment when she put her hand on the opened door at the back, Krulcifer's body suddenly fell.

"Krulcifer-san!"

"Uh…"

As she shook her head in order to shake off the pain, Krulcifer tried to get up.

But, she could not get up straight.

Her body which Lux supported was tinged with a strong fever.

"So hot, don't tell me…?"

"…I'm all right, I can still—"

『Gagaga…, pipipipi—!

The moment when Krulcifer answered like so, vibrations ran around.

"An earthquake? No—"

『Danger. Due to vibrations, the inside collapsed. Please evacuate to a safe room.

Soon after the voice was emitted from the object, as it said the ceiling began to crumble.

"……!"

Supporting Krulcifer who could no longer move, Lux slipped into a nearby room.

The vibrations settled and the surroundings regained its silence once again.

……

"It looks like the outside of the door has been blocked with rubble."

Having escaped from the collapse for the time being, Lux who heaved a breath of relief muttered so.

Though the collapse was small, as expected this layer seemed to be dangerous.

That was surely the result of various predecessors breaking and digging through the building in order to get Machine Dragons and materials related to them.

Depending on the location of the ruins, there also seemed to be parts which became relatively fragile.

“Let’s settle down for a little while. With your body like that, it’s impossible to use <Fafnir>. I’ll look over the situation around here a little, so—”

After the vibrations from the collapse settled, Lux told so to Krulcifer who cast her eyes down and stood up.

Probably because of the shock, most of the light around disappeared and darkness wrapped the vicinity.

“…I am sorry.”

He heard a faint voice from the girl who hung her head down.

“No. Don’t worry about it. More importantly —eh?”

When Lux was going to state his concern about Krulcifer’s body, her thin fingertips softly held his hand.

“Could you allow my selfishness just for a little bit? I would like you to hear my story.”

“……”

“I am not a human of this world. I am— a survivor of the ruins.”

“A survivor…?”

Lux couldn’t help but become speechless at the words suddenly spat out.

Part 10

"I see, so — were you able to confirm her function as a "key"?"

The same time at Fort City.

In a room of a stately mansion located in the dwelling district of the wealthy, two figures were sitting, facing each other.

They were Barzeride Kreutzer called "Title Holder of the Kingdom" and an existence wearing a jet-black robe.

"Yeah, I expressly tagged along for sightseeing, but in order to protect that woman from the Abyss's explosion, it looks like I was drawn to the ruins. When you expressly came here to say that I should marry a woman of the country Ymir, I wondered what it was about — but with this, I understand now."

Barzeride contentedly muttered so and inclined the wine glass in his hand.

"If we get that "key", it will be possible to arrive at the depths of the ruins. Wonderful. With this, I will get the " strongest power" and the "greatest fortune"."

"That's good for you. Then in order to control her easily, shall I sell you a special medicine? I can make a docile — living doll for you."

The figure in robe said so as he warped his mouth.

Although his eyes couldn't be seen as they were hidden under a hood, his voice was distorted with bottomless malice.

"I'm sorry, but I don't use those kinds of means."

But, Barzeride calmly shook his head while returning a smile.

"I took a liking to that woman, you see? If I don't make her yield directly with my own hands, I won't be satisfied. Be it the pride or dignity she has piled up, I'll pin all of it and make her become my thing. In this country, women are no more than tools for us men to push on our way to the top. I have to make her thoroughly understand that. Her skill as a Drag-Knight is also excellent, and besides — even as a tool for night time , it looks like I can enjoy it for a long time."

"What a good hobby you have, "Title Holder of the Kingdom"."

The figure in robe who understood his intention contentedly nodded.

“But for the engagement with her, it has turned into a strange duel. Do you have any chances of victory?”

“That’s a stupid question, brethren.”

As Barzeride replied immediately, he softly touched the hilt of the Sword Device hung to his waist with his fingers.

“The Divine Raiment of <Aži Dahāka> which I bought from you is the strongest. I don’t feel like losing no matter who the opponent is. Even if that legendary “ Black Hero” is to appear, he won’t be a match for the current me.”

“Yes, Speaking of which — there is one thing I have to tell you about that, Lord Kreutzer.”

The figure in robe changed his frivolous voice to a serious one and told so.

Opening his gray pupils, hidden in the shadow, wide to the limit, the man laughed.

"The Old Empire's legend — the Black Hero's true identity and his Divine Raiment. Don't you want to buy this information?"

Part 11

"I am not a human of this world. I am— a survivor of the ruins."

To Krulcifer's words, Lux could not help but freeze.

In this altar room where they couldn't move from due to the collapse, a quiet voice resounded.

"A human of the ruins…, don't tell me—"

"I was found in the ruins of Ymir—, a place called the "fourth ruins – Hole". No, saying that I was excavated would be correct."

"By that, what do you mean?"

"Do you remember the <Box> of a little while ago? A treasure box in which the inheritance of the old times sleeps in. Similarly, it seems that I was sleeping within a

box with a form different from that. I, who was still very young, that is. At that time, the Head of the Einvolk House who was doing the ruins' investigation — and currently my foster father found me."

"Then, for the Einvolk House…"

"Of course, since it is a proper House, I was taken in as an adopted child. Or so I thought. They probably have some kind of expectation from me. They should have wanted me as a clue connected to the ruins — and a lost past. I, who had no memory at all of the past, was living in the Einvolk House, knowing nothing about such a thing."

"……"

"Around the time when I was also enough, I had understood that I was an adopted child. My parents, my siblings, the employees, everybody was somewhat distant, so I naturally became aware of it. That I— was different from the people of this house. That's why I worked very hard. In order to please to everyone and in order to have them accept me as a member of the family someday. Really no matter how hard things were, I endured them and kept working hard."

"Krulcifer, san…"

"And like that, before I became aware, I was called a genius. Be it study or etiquette… also as Drag-Knight, I was recognized as a first-class user. But… in the end, the thing I wanted the most, I was not able to obtain it."

"……"

The Einvolk Family, A distinguished family of knights and Drag-Knights.

Because she had no blood relationship, the girl struggled for a place to stay.

So, she piled up ability and results through years of hard work and reached the top.

But—,

"No. Far from it, before I became aware, they became more distant. The harder I was working, the bigger the distance to them became. I, who possessed a skill to the extent of being given a Divine Drag-Ride at this age, was avoided by my siblings before I was aware. As expected,

it was because of the fact that I am a creature different from them. One day, I had accidentally heard about it when my father and my big brother were talking."

Resignation and loneliness were mixed in the tone of Krulcifer who talked indifferently.

"And finally like this, I was also kept away from the House. The rampage that occurred in the ruins of Ymir; after that incident, I was treated like an angel of death and thus sent to another country. Not having taken my Divine Drag-Ride was probably in order to give some weight to it as an article for sale."

"Is that why you were so obsessed with this ruins' investigation?"

"Yes… I always wanted to confirm it. Whether I was really a human of the ruins. I thought that maybe what I had heard until now was some kind of mistake, and that the real me is just an ordinary human and a person from the Einvolk House, but—"

Treasure and technology which slept in the ruins.

Lux understood that she was not interested in such a thing that many people sought.

"My true identity is, after all, a human of the ruins. After seeing the ruins' reaction to me, I'm now sure of that. But— I was not able to remember anything about the me and the events of the past."

Quietly casting down her eyes, Krulcifer sighed.

"Y-You cannot jump to conclusions yet! It isn't as if you examined everything here, too; and perhaps, there might be other clues in the ruins in Ymir—"

"No, it's fine already."

"Eh…?"

To the words which suddenly fell, Lux could not help but doubt his eyes.

Krulcifer's lean figure was trembling little by little.

"I have already become scared now, so… I wonder why. Even though I hated so much the family of the Einvolk House… even though I wanted to know the truth, if I came to know that I am really an outsider and " different", then I would become helplessly frightened. If I continued to explore the ruins here, and if there was any

other people from the ruins like me or ordinary people accepting my existence — When I think so."

"Krulcifer…san"

To Krulcifer who showed a fleeting profile, Lux silently stretched his hands.

"I'm sorry. For having made you go along with my selfishness, for such a nobody like me—"

"That's not true!"

Lux raised his voice, and grasped Krulcifer's hands.

"Lux…kun?"

"Neither Ymir nor the Einvolk House matters. Krulcifer-san is a friend the same as us, and for now — my love… partner right?! So — no longer say such lonely things…"

Lux, who became embarrassed at his voice which got excited, quietly looked away while saying that still holding her hands.

"……"

After Krulcifer stared at Lux with a blank face for only several seconds,

"Fu, Fufufu…"

She burst into laughter with a face as if she was enduring something.

"…Eh?"

"Lux-kun. I will give you one advice. You should not easily believe a woman's complaints."

"Eh, eeeeeeeeeeeeh…!?"

Krulcifer who suddenly returned to a cool expression said so as to tease him.

"Wait, was what you said a while ago a lie!?"

When Lux confusedly released Krulcifer's hands,

"You should stop sympathizing with other people's misfortunes. Your only weakness is being generous with others, so I said that just to test it; but this reaction of yours was more than expected. Be careful at the time of the duel."

"…Ah, Hahaha."

To the words of Krulcifer who looked as if nothing had happened, Lux smiled wryly for a while.

"But really, why are you so softhearted. Even you were a Prince of that notorious Old Empire—"

"Though I think that it isn't really like I'm softhearted. This is surely because such was my fate."

To Krulcifer's mutter, Lux answered with a distant look.

"Eh…?"

"I had been banished from the Imperial Court along with my mother and my little sister Airi because of an admonition of my maternal grandfather. My grandfather

was a former feudal lord, and he had also worked as the person in charge of the imperial family's education, so I think that he wasn't able to remain silent after witnessing the Empire's way of doing things. But—"

At that time, the Emperor and Prime Minister imprisoned his grandfather and also banished Lux and company from the Imperial Court as punishment.

And then, one day after two years, an incident occurred.

When the carriage that Lux and his mother rode on slipped down a cliff, the territory people, out of the grudge of being oppressed by the Old Empire, let Lux's mother who was injured die.

They did not get rescued.

Because they had offended and were banished from the Imperial Court, his father the emperor did not even come to the funeral.

Lux and company were shunned and forsaken by both the imperial family and the people.

"That's a really tragic story… Did you not resent anyone?"

"I resented them, of course."

Lux awkwardly laughed and replied.

"The Emperor who is my father, the imperial family, the Old Empire, the territory people, I resented everyone around me. I think that I probably cursed even this world . I became desperate. I became disgusted by anything and everything — but"

"But?"

"Philphie saved me. I, who also lost almost all value as royalty, she had been by my side all the time—. She slipped out of her House and came to see me every day. But one day, she got lost, and I decided to go looking for her."

Even to Lux's wry smile, Krulcifer did not laugh.

"I noticed then. That I didn't actually want to hate anyone. Because of the Empire, I didn't want to hate those important to me— or those who might become so."

"……"

"That's why I wanted to change the country. I wanted to create a country where no one would have to hate those that they like… See, I also have something like lineage, but I was in the lowest rank of the royalty."

He said so and turned a smile to Krulcifer.

"—You really are a good person, eh."

"That's not right. After all, I…"

At Krulcifer's earnest words, Lux returned so.

"If you had ended up becoming the Prince of the New Kingdom, would you also have saved me?"

"Eh…?"

"No, it is nothing."

The moment when Krulcifer returned again to her usual smile,

"Hey! Are you under here!? Lux! Krulcifer!"

From upstairs, Lisha came down with the sound of friction caused by metal.

“Lisha-sama!?”

- bakii*! Knocking a nearby ceiling, four Machine Dragons got down.

“Ooh, they are here! Finally found you, Lux!”

When looking up at the broken ceiling, there were Lisha wearing the <Chimeric Wyvern>, and the three girls of the Triad respectively wearing each a general-purpose Machine Dragon.

They seemed to have dug through until nearby with the armament attached to the <Chimeric Wyvern>’s right arm.

“Everyone, have you come to rescue us!?”

“Yes. I was able to perceive your positions with my < Drake>, so — it’s good that you’re safe above all.”

Lux heaved a sigh of relief at Nokuto’s voice.

"It's almost the time when the gate will open. I'll carry you, so let's go quickly."

When Lisha said so, she was about to first carry Lux with the <Chimeric Wyvern>'s left hand, but

"You should first take Krulcifer-san. She seems to be hurt."

Nokuto calmly pointed out so.

"…Wha!? B-But… Thinking carefully, my right arm is equipped with a drill, so there will be no sense of stability to hold an injured person. Hey Sharis, I leave Krulcifer to you whose both hands are empty."

"Good grief, what an incorrigible Princess."

While smiling wryly at Lisha's order, Sharis wearing a <Wyvern> got down.

"We have already given the excavated ancient documents and Machine Dragons' parts to the other members and made them wait near the "gate". And now with you two safe like this, we can say that the strategy this time is a success."

While Sharis said so, she picked up Krulcifer.

“What a relief. Everyone is safe. Well then, let’s go back.”

After Tillfarr added that at last, they all started moving .

On the way to the “gate”, fortunately no Abyss appeared and they were able to safely escape from the ruins.

Part 12

“So in the end, there was no results obtained related to the “key”, huh? Even though your <Wyvern> was seriously damaged—”

When Lux returned to the girl’s dormitory and finished his medical checkup, he was given instructions of “complete bed rest” for a while.

In the medical office in the evening, there was no one else except just Airi and Lux now.

Although Lux had not suffered apparent injuries, since fatigue had accumulated due to injuries like bruises and his Machine Dragon's operation, he was told not to fight for a while.

Krulcifer and the Knight Squadron's members who travelled along also ended their medical treatment, and were now under rest.

"No, like I said, sorry."

"I am angry because Nii-san has not reflected on anything at all. In addition to that, the ruins are dangerous, and yet you acted recklessly again—"

About that, when he protected Krulcifer from the collapse of the ruins, he had hit his body here and there; so there was no helping it, but

"In the end — that horn was not a "key", huh?"

"Yes. In that situation, I was afraid to use it and even when I held it up inside the ruins, there was no decent reaction which made it look like a key."

Something which was a possibility having arrived at the depths of the ruins.

But, he could not say yet that he had found a different "key".

About the fact that the path to the door had been already opened by the power of the girl of the ruins that was Krulcifer.

"I see… It's regrettable that there was no progress with this, but there's no helping it."

With this, the ruins investigation rights that the Atismata New Kingdom owned had been fully used once .

In order to investigate the ruins once again, they had to win the off-campus confrontation battle against the neighboring countries by using Drag-Rides and acquire those rights.

For the off-campus confrontation battle in one month, a campus selection battle would begin in one week.

Lux also had to decide what he would do for that battle.

But, before that… there was something he had to do.

"Then, Nii-san. Please, drink this."

As Lux forcibly raised half his body, Airi held out a cup containing a dark brown liquid to him.

"This is—?"

"It's a medicine. Since you will make it in time for the duel, please take a rest at least for now."

"…Yes. Thank you."

Lux took the cup containing the medicine and drank it up in one gulp.

"…Ngh, hum"

After a while, he closed his eyes and groaned a bit.

As he fell asleep before long, he started leaking small sleeper's breathing.

"—Are you satisfied with this? Krulcifer-san."

"Yes, thank you."

Immediately after, Krulcifer entered into the medical office.

Then, after seeing Lux lying down on the bed, she leaked a small breath.

“Like this, we can feel at ease for the time being.”

With her usual cool expression.

“Is it all right? If you ask Nii-san, I think that he will fight with you.”

When Airi asked so wonderingly,

“He will certainly. But—”

Krulcifer muttered as she cast down her eyes with hesitation.

While Lux would still be sleeping due to the medicine with strong sleep effect, the duel would be over.

It was also Krulcifer who asked Airi for the concoction of a medicine for that purpose.

"I cannot afford to get your brother involved with my situation any more than this. He has already helped me a lot."

"In any case, it will be impossible for Nii-san to fight tonight."

Airi, staring at Lux's sleeping as such, calmly concluded.

"Not only injuries and fatigue during the ruins investigation, but his <Wyvern> was also seriously damaged. He can't fight properly with it just slightly repaired. And against two powerful people in the duel at that."

"That's right."

With an attitude saying that she understood, Krulcifer turned her heels.

In any case, Lux did not have a Drag-Ride to fight with .

"Besides — since we are talking about Nii-san, if compelled, he might try to use <Bahamut>."

The “Black Hero” who destroyed the Old Empire five years ago.

If he used <Bahamut>, his true identity might be known by those two opponents.

If that happened, in exchange for victory, Lux would draw further danger to himself.

Therefore, Krulcifer, after consideration, made this decision.

A way to bring her fate to an end by herself without relying on Lux.

“Well then, I’ll leave him to you. You surely understand even without me saying it, but if he were to wake up, tell him that the duel was called off—. This request also will be over by tomorrow.”

Putting the request of the matter on a nearby table, Krulcifer left the medical room.

After the sound of her footsteps disappeared, Airi sighed.

“As expected, you still know nothing about Ni-san…”

Airi muttered in a resigned, amazed and somehow casual tone.

Suddenly, the door was strongly knocked on, and Lisha came in.

“Hey, Lux? Are your injuries all right? —Wait, the little sister is also here, huh.”

Slightly disappointed, Lisha turned her gaze to Airi.

“Is there something the matter? Lizsharte-sama.”

“No. I checked a little with my authority about a matter which Lux had asked before. That man called Barzeride — he is quite suspicious. He’s an ambitious person and it seems that he had hired bandits as private soldiers several times in the past.”

“That is certainly strange.”

“But, the situation is much worse now. It was written in the letter delivered from mother just a while ago. The reason why we mustn’t overthrown Barzeride and his aim. This New Kingdom’s crisis will be—”

And Lisha began to talk next to Lux who was sleeping.

About the conspiracy of the “Title Holder of the Kingdom” hidden in this matter.

Episode 4 – Duel

Part 1

Lux's memory of seven years ago.

At the funeral of Lux's mother, there was no one of the imperial family.

Probably because of their social position after they were banished from the Imperial Court, it was so plain that it was hard to imagine that she had been a queen.

Even so, it did not matter for Lux.

What should be done from now on and how to protect his little sister Airi, who was lying down in sickness.

Lux was just looking vacantly at the stained glass in a church.

After a while, he came out of the church to go back home.

In front of his mother's gravestone where the few relatives had already left, someone was standing.

A silver-haired man wearing black clothes.

Lux was slightly familiar with that man of a calm demeanor.

“About your mother, it was regrettable.”

The man’s name was Fugil Acadia. He was Lux’s half-brother.

He did not stay long in the Imperial Court, and even Lux who was estranged to the power struggle somehow understood.

That this man — he was somewhat different from the other members of the imperial family.

“Little brother. If you want to achieve something as royalty, you may ask me. In the imperial family, even if you are banished from the Court, there are some special privileges you still have as royalty. It may be difficult by yourself, but if I put in a good word for you, you may be able to learn a thing or two.”

When he said “able to learn a thing or two”, he was speaking about various studies including tactics and administration, and Drag-Rides.

Be it decorations or a diplomatic tool, Lux would not be blamed for raising his "quality" as a royalty by basic education.

"It will be a long and steep way. But perhaps your determination may change the Empire. Do you want to try?"

"…Please."

From that day onwards, the relation between Lux and Fugil began.

Permission to access the royal library, and Drag-Ride guidance. And—

Then, one day after seven months, Fugil witnessed a certain scene.

"What is going on? Little brother."

One of the Machine Dragon practice field located in the Imperial Capital.

There were a pile of destroyed <Wyverns> in the corner.

At this time, Fugil had funds with which Lux used to operate a Drag-Ride, but he heard about repeated injuries and Machine Dragons' damages from his attendant, and came to see the situation.

"I'm sorry. I failed a little—"

"It's not like you. How is it possible that you, who has shown a skill which should be called a natural talent as a Drag-Knight until now, fail to operate—. Hmm…?"

Fugil who noticed the abnormality opened his eyes wide.

The destroyed <Wyverns> had a strange common point.

The armor from the right arm wielding the blade to the back wings was squashed in a strange shape and broke.

And on the other hand, one part of a wall covered with a board of steel was shattered and disappeared.

A wall which a sword could not cut and a shelling could not shatter, either.

"This doesn't look like you operate the Drag-Ride commonly. Did you try some kind of special method of operation?"

Fugil who grasped the unlikely situation inquired as he could not hide his surprise.

"Yes."

With an expressionless face, Lux plainly replied.

"With just an "ordinary strength", I will come to regret once again. In order to protect the things important to me , I want a stronger power."

The memory faded and became blurred.

That's right. I can't forget.

There was a promise which he swore to himself.

And then, Lux woke up.

Part 2

Under the night sky where the moon floated, Krulcifer was standing.

The church site designated as the place of the duel was located in the outskirts of the Fort City third block.

A desolated abandoned building which was destroyed after becoming the battlefield against an Abyss which appeared about two years ago.

That site, where numerous debris were scattered about and the outer wall destroyed in every direction remained , was at least 1km away from a town where there were signs of people.

Moreover, there was stage where Drag-Knights were deployed for lookout and dispersing unrelated people.

Standing there were Barzeride and Alterize.

“I came at the agreed time, my future wife. I believed that you would safely finish the mission of ruins investigation and return.”

As Barzeride exaggeratedly said so, Krulcifer, face to him, slightly frowned.

"By the way — what about that man whom you said about being your lover? I heard that he safely returned from the ruins, but did he fall from fatigue? Or — did he get scared and run away?"

"I had him go back."

Krulcifer was not shaken at his entwining-like provocation.

She said so as to brush it away and turned her cold piercing eyes towards the two people.

"I cannot let him get involved with such worthless farce any more than this—"

Then, she calmly unsheathed her Sword Device that was hung to her waist.

Barzeride seeing that smiled and loudly spoke.

"The start time is from now on. The conclusion will be until either, when the worn Machine Dragon is cancelled or when the two opponents of the duel accept to surrender."

As to follow, Alterize, a servant of the Einvolk House also drew her Sword Device.

“Intentional escape from this church site which is the stage of the duel will be considered a defeat. Other than that, the rules are conformed to those used in the tournament held in the Capital of this country. You’re fine with that, right? Miss.”

“Yes, I have made up my mind. Since a long time ago–_”

“……”

Krulcifer’s words which somehow had a hidden meaning.

Repressing her faint unrest, Alterize inhaled.

“—Come forth, dragon symbolizing immortality. Turn into the fangs of the linking Earth. <EX Wyrm>!”

Countless particles of light danced at the same time she said the pass code, and the <EX Wyrm> which was a reinforced ground-type Machine Dragon was summoned .

The greatest military power given to a skillful Drag-Knight not possessing a Divine Drag-Ride.

Barzeride turned a look of admiration to Alterize's Drag-Ride.

"As expected of the Einvolk House. To think that even a butler Drag-Knight has the skill of EX-class. I look forward more and more to my engagement with you. Krulcifer."

"Could you please stop acting familiar with me? It is a waste of time."

Krulcifer returned a cold voice to Barzeride's praise.

"I am an orphan. When you are living in the house of other people for a long time, you can understand certain things. Such as what others really think of you."

"Hou…?"

Soon after Barzeride muttered so, Krulcifer set up her sword.

"—Reincarnate. The Giant Dragon of calamity imprisoned by worldly treasures. Become the equivalence of an endless desire, <Fafnir>."

Immediately after, the surrounding space was distorted and countless particles of light gathered.

Having been formed was a huge silver Machine Dragon reminiscent of an ice statue.

When it opened from the inside, it instantly changed into armor which wrapped Krulcifer's body.

Barzeride, who saw the summon, grinned.

Then, he himself also equipped his body with <Aži Dahāka>, glanced at Alterize and urged her to give the start signal.

"Then duel, start!"

Soon after Alterize shouted, Krulcifer's <Fafnir> flew.

She threw a Dagger aiming at Barzeride and swiftly set up her special armament — the <Freezing Canon>.

Long-range high speed precise shooting which was Krulcifer's battle style.

The moment when Barzeride strengthened his barrier in order to flip the Dagger, Krulcifer immediately pulled the trigger.

She aimed her attacks towards the direction where he dodged and at the opening when he blocked.

A blue flash tinged with cold pierced the dark night and impacted Barzeride.

- pakin*! A sound of freezing instantly resounded and Krulcifer confirmed the hit.

But—,

"For a surprise attack, it lacks in appeal, but I praise your judgment and skill. Krulcifer."

Krulcifer shuddered at Barzeride's calm voice.

"……!?"

What had been frozen was a lump of debris that <Aži Dahāka> threw out in front of itself.

A piece of a collapsed building that fell into this place which was the church site.

He smashed it with his halberd and defended against the <Freezing Canon> by rolling it up as another shield.

The mass was not being enough being just dug-up debris, so it was usually difficult to implement this countermeasure.

So having chosen this church site for the duel was within Barzeride's plan.

"I was careless. To come up with a countermeasure so early. Is this your doing? Alterize."

A countermeasure which was the only weak point of the <Freezing Canon>.

There was also the possibility that Barzeride himself, who saw it once in the battle of the ruins investigation, came up with it, but if someone who knew of it beforehand suggested the plan—

"What might you mean?"

Alterize's <EX Wyrm> jumped towards Krulcifer flying in mid-air.

When Krulcifer barely dodged the twin swords sharply swung, Alterize showed a smile.

"Your skills grew dull. Miss."

"____!"

Rotating the Machine Dragon's airframe in the air, she further came slashing with the other blade.

But,

"The naïve one is you."

The blade's slash was blocked by the automatic special armament which activated regardless of the user's will — the <Auto Shield>.

But at that moment, the <Devil's Glow> which extended from both shoulders of Barzeride's <Aži Dahāka> had set up its aim on Krulcifer.

"With that special armament, can you also defend against this?"

- doun*!, two lines of shelling attacked <Fafnir>.

This attack itself could be blocked with the <Auto Shield>.

But, in that case, it would cause her posture to collapse and Alterize would probably follow after.

At this rate, it would gradually turn into a defensive battle.

(As expected — I have no other choice but to gamble.)

Krulcifer judged so while grasping the two people's movements.

With a body in which injury and fatigue by the ruins investigation remained, she would be the one at a disadvantage in a drawn-out battle.

Therefore, she activated <Fafnir>'s Divine Raiment < Wise Blood>.

The foresight ability which perceived the future within a radius of a dozen of Mel several seconds ahead.

When she dodged the attacks with that Divine Raiment, Krulcifer perceived her path to victory line.

"I see — you're strong. You're indeed strong."

From a remote location, Barzeride repeated that as he was impressed.

"But you know, Krulcifer? You should quietly become my wife after all. That way, you can be happy. I don't want to hurt you even by any chance. Could you please surrender now?"

To Barzeride who uttered an ingratiating voice, Krulcifer leaked a sigh.

"Sorry but — I am not fond of talkative men."

And at the same time she replied, she began to move.

"……!? Fast!"

Leaving Alterize who was in front of her in a lurch, <Fafnir> accelerated.

With the flight device of the back wings at max power, she charged at Barzeride at a speed which the eyes couldn't catch.

"Are you actually challenging the ground-typed Machine Dragon <Aži Dahāka> as the opponent to close-range combat? Interesting."

Barzeride set up his halberd with a fearless smile.

In contrast, Krulcifer brandished a medium-sized blade and slashed at him.

Without any fear to the halberd which was let out as to flip her blade up, Krulcifer charged.

"In the case of a simultaneous and mutual clash, it'll be my victory, you know?"

Krulcifer was aware of the fact that the armor and barrier possessed by <Aži Dahāka> boasted of a unmatched defensive power.

The moment when each other's weapon was about to cross—,

"I wonder about that."

Krulcifer suddenly smiled.

“What…!?”

Soon after, Barzeride opened his eyes wide.

The canon of the special armament installed on the right shoulder of the Divine Drag-Ride <Aži Dahāka> shattered.

She was aiming at the special armament on the shoulder and the Force Core from the start.

Then, she dodged the blow of Barzeride who should have the advantage in close-range combat by a hairbreadth.

“The ability to read the future, it’s your Divine Raiment…”

Future foresight by <Wise Blood>.

While dodging Barzeride’s attack using it, she set up a counterattack.

"Nicely done, Krulcifer. Though there are some flaws, I will praise your skill for having broken my right shoulder as splendid."

"It's good and all that you praise me, but I have not done anything special yet."

"Lord Kreutzer! Please, step back! It is dangerous at that range!"

From far behind, Alterize's shout could be heard.

However, it was too late.

By <Wise Blood>'s future foresight, Krulcifer would be able to predict all of the offense and defense in close-range combat.

And in this land where debris were buried here and there, it would take at least three seconds until Alterize's <EX Wyrm> could catch up with them.

Even a long-range shelling would be blocked by the <Auto Shield>.

All was according to Krulcifer's calculation.

"Well then, goodbye."

She did not let her guard down until the end.

When Krulcifer's blade was about to break the Force Core which was under the battery of the shattered shoulder—

"Do you really think that you can beat me?"

"—Eh?"

Suddenly, the image of future foresight disappeared from Krulcifer's field of vision.

Barzeride's attack which she foresaw swayed like haze , and from the special armament of <Aži Dahāka>'s left shoulder, the canon was shot at almost point-blank range .

The <Auto Shield> instantly activated, and an impact and flames burst in front of the seven shields.

While subtly groaning, Krulcifer stared at the burst of explosive flames before her eyes.

"Kuh…!? Why did Wise Blood> again—!"

Her physical and spiritual strength should not have run out yet.

Of course, it was a fact that she was already exhausted before the duel, but still she made a plan where she could use only the Divine Raiment and her special armaments.

Nevertheless—,

"That is because you mistook my ability."

"……!?"

Flame and smoke rising like a pillar.

Being hidden within their shadow, Barzeride's <Aži Dahāka> took a roundabout path to <Fafnir>'s flank.

The halberd was struck at a sharp angle.

The <Auto Shield> automatically activated and tried to prevent that attack, but—

- pakin*!

The seven shields deployed in the air were flipped and the halberd hit the airframe.

"Uh, kuh…!"

Although it hit the barrier, the power that its (halberd) weight carried could not be completely suppressed.

While being blown off along with <Fafnir> and rolling on the ground of the abandoned building, she bumped into a mountain of rubble.

"Kaha…! Uh, ah…"

Her usually composed face twisted in pain, and Krulcifer writhed.

"Oops, sorry. It's the important belly which will someday conceive my child. I've got to be a little gentler. "

Contrary to his words, Barzeride was laughing with an expression free of any sense of guilt.

(It's strange. Why did something like this—)

The fact that the future foresight by the Divine Raiment <Wise Blood> was erased and that the <Auto Shield> which boasted of an absolute defense was broken through.

It did not happen due to Krulcifer's mistake or the fatigue.

Her spare energy calculation should have been accurately done.

And yet, what was this reality?

Besides, Barzeride, a "man" who should have already hit his limit due to his Machine Dragon aptitude value being low showed no signs of being tired yet.

Did it mean that not only his skill enough to be called "Title Holder of the Kingdom", but also his Machine Dragon aptitude was not average?

(But—, I'm not yet…)

In a desperate situation enough to make one lose their fighting spirit, Krulcifer repressed her pain and stood up.

"Do you still intend to fight? Though your perseverance deserves praise, you no longer have any chance of winning."

"We won't know until I try."

When she took a deep breath and changed her mood, Krulcifer flew with a trajectory describing an arc and brandished her blade.

"<Wise Blood>."

Then, she once again activated <Fafnir>'s Divine Raiment and read the future several seconds ahead.

While reading Alterize's shelling from behind and avoiding it, she feigned a slashing attack and tried to strike the <Howling Roar> on <Aži Dahāka> — but,

"Don't make me repeat myself."

"—!? The foresight again…"

Once again, the effect of the future foresight by <Wise Blood> disappeared and a shelling was released from <Aži Dahāka>'s left canon.

It erased the <Howling Roar>'s impact and pulverized the debris far behind.

"Why did the attack just now—"

The <Howling Roar> was an attack originally used in order to flip a throwing attack.

The enemy had accurately set up his canon against the attack of Krulcifer who was taken aback.

Just as if he predicted everything.

"Did you think that I wouldn't able to read your movements?"

At the same time with his voice, the halberd was swung once again.

"Kuh…!?"

The blow which creaked the tenacious armor of <Fafnir> hit directly; exactly at the same place of just a while ago.

She was once again blown right off besides and her back struck the broken wall.

"Ka, hah…!"

She violently hit her whole body and her breathing stopped for a moment.

Even so, when she tried to fight back, <Fafnir>'s armor arm which grasped the <Freezing Canon> was swiftly knocked down.

"How unsightly—. Don't disappoint me, my future wife. Don't struggle unnecessarily in a fight that you've no chance of winning. That's what I believe."

Barzeride suddenly talked as to persuade her.

Alterize probably also felt the same way.

Not starting pursuit with the <EX Wyrm>, she was watching the course of events at that place.

If there were other spectators here, anyone of them should have thought that the outcome was decided.

But—,

"I am sorry to disappoint you—, but I am not fond of men who tell obvious lies."

Suddenly making her usual serious expression, Krulcifer asserted.

"What…?"

"Disappoint you? No, you should have been glad. For tormenting me like this — for this expected development ."

Barzeride's expression which was revealing a faint smile instantly changed into a cold one.

"You are cancelling my Divine Raiment. Probably for that reason — in order to read the scope of my power, you joined that ruins investigation. Even saying that you took a liking to me as a wife is also a lie. It's because it looks like you can use me as a tool, right?"

"……"

Barzeride, showing no signs of interrupting, was silently listening to the words of Krulcifer who indifferently told that.

"Besides—, about when we were attacked by Drag-Knights in the upper class residential area. Wasn't

that also your doing? In order for people like them to enter that zone, the guidance of an influential person is necessary. If you saw my <Fafnir>'s ability over there, it would have saved you the trouble of tagging along in the investigation, right?"

"…Haa!"

At the same time when Krulcifer concluded her words, Barzeride revealed a wicked smile.

And, he applied pressure to <Fafnir> with <Aži Dahāka>'s stout arm.

"Ku, uuh…!"

With a power which could by no means destroy the flesh, but to the extent of fully giving pain, he slowly applied pressure so as to not let Alterize who was on standby behind notice.

"As expected of a girl which becomes a "key" of the ruins. You were able to read so far."

"…!? You—!?"

About the fact that she was a human from the ruins and that she had the ability as a “key”.

Being told about her true identity which should have been secret, Krulcifer’s face turned pale.

“How sad, Krulcifer. What a sorrowful girl you are. To think that the likes of tool of the Einvolk House — the thing sold over to me now was that clever.”

In a grieving tone, Barzeride continued.

“Yes. It’s as you said. Krulcifer.”

Barzeride muttered so in a whispering voice.

“Anything and everything has been plotted by me. Hearing about you who is a “key” which open the ruins, and approaching that butler with the engagement. Though someone got in the way earlier and defeated the bandits. And also having summoned a new Abyss at that time in front of the ruins. Everything—”

“……”

"But you know? Even if you know the truth, you can't do anything after all. You, who is no more than a "tool" in this world, can in no way change this reality."

A look full of contempt and a twisted mouth.

Barzeride Kreutzer's true character could be seen there .

"—Tool."

To that word thrust at her, Krulcifer's body trembled.

Her skill as a Drag-Knight and even her trusted < Fafnir> had been defeated.

Krulcifer's mask which did not come off despite this was about to collapse.

She was picked up as a survivor of the ruins by the Einvolk House, and in order to acquire the bonds of a family she was not born from, she accumulated efforts oozing of blood (desperate efforts).

But, however much honor she was given, her desire of the family she wanted just drifted further away—

(No, it's wrong—. From the start, I didn't have it…)

"You don't understand, Krulcifer. The likes of a tool like you mustn't oppose me."

An ice-like cold sensation took away the temperature from her body.

Comrades who could acknowledge her existence might be in the ruins.

If she was a human of the present era, her family might have accepted her.

Thinking only about chasing these possibilities, she had desperately sought the truth until now.

"I will make all the ruins' technology and treasures my own and ultimately stand at the top of this country. You're a tool for that purpose. If you behave yourself, I'll cherish you from now on."

He took down the halberd which he was grasping, and stroked Krulcifer's belly with the fingertips of his Machine Dragon.

"You understand, right? There is nobody in this world that will come save you. So, accept it. Your fate of devoting yourself to me, your master— …!?"

While he was speaking, <Aži Dahāka>'s armor arm was taken away from Krulcifer's belly.

After just a moment, a blade glittered in that space and a dagger pierced the ground.

"Who is it!?"

Barzeride retreated and looked up at the night sky.

There was one dragon there.

The symbol of destruction which overwhelmed those who saw it and inspired awe.

With the pale moon in the background, Lux wearing <Bahamut> calmly looked down at the battlefield.

そこに、一匹の竜がいた。

見る者を圧倒し、

畏怖を抱かせる破滅の象徴。

青白い月を背にした、

漆黒の巨竜――

《ハムート》

"Why…?"

Krulcifer who looked up as if getting hook on it muttered in mute amazement.

"—I'm sorry for being late, Krulcifer-san. I heard the circumstances from Airi."

Lux showed a gentle smile and called out to her.

But,

『Not that! I did not intend to get you involved anymore!

She sent a sorrowful cry to Lux through the dragon voice.

『Why did you come wearing <Bahamut>!? Like this, even your true identity will be—

His <Wyvern> was seriously damaged in the ruins investigation and could not be used.

Even Lux himself got injured protecting Krulcifer and ended up consuming his strength.

And he couldn't afford to let these two people know his true identity which was the "Black Hero" now.

Therefore, even though she made Lux sleep with medicine at that time and engaged in the duel alone—

"I'm Lux Acadia, a duel opponent. Currently at this time, I enter the battle."

When Lux said so in a voice full of determination, he landed in front of Krulcifer and stood in the way.

"A jet black Divine Drag-Ride…? Who on earth is he—"

Alterize muttered as she was perplexed and tightly grasped her twin swords.

Alterize had also heard about the story of the "Black Hero" — the legend which destroyed the Old Empire.

But, it was just a wild tale of a foreign country.

Even with the real thing just before her eyes, she was not immediately aware of his true identity.

"Hahahaha! Hahaha!"

At the same time, Barzeride burst into laughter.

He glared at Lux with a happy expression.

“Look whose here, I mistook you. I was sure you ran away. To think that you reveal your true identity just to save one woman—. It looks like you are an unexpectedly stupid man, eh, “Black Hero”.”

“……!”

To Barzeride’s pointing that out, Lux changed his expression to a sharp one for an instant.

“—“Black Hero”!? No way, this boy is…!?”

Though Alterize confused also shouted, Lux did not move an inch.

He was just calmly staring at Barzeride in front of him.

“No, shall I say the rumored “Self-proclaimed Hero”? Stop doing such a meaningless thing. Even if you fight in spite of your injury and fatigue, this woman won’t bring you any benefit.”

“……!”

Krulcifer inwardly chewed her teeth to that being pointed out.

He probably saw through Lux's fatigue and small injuries from the slight gap of his center of gravity.

Although arrogant, as expected of someone from the Four Great Nobles and the Drag-Knight called "Title Holder of the Kingdom".

Even his ability was not just a decoration. But—

"I refuse. Lord Kreutzer."

Lux, not even shaken, stared at Barzeride and said.

"What…?"

"You don't understand at all how worthy she is."

At the same time as his voice, he set up his large jet black sword.

And when he put strength into his feet to jump in a straight line—,

"Wait!"

- gow*! Creating a gust of wind, Alterize sprung at Lux.

"Lord Kreutzer is worn out by fighting with her. This is a two vs. two formal duel. First, I shall be your opponent."

She made use of her physical strength strengthened with the <EX Wyrm> to the maximum and slashed at <Bahamut> with her twin swords.

A surprise, instant attack.

"Lux-kun!?"

When Krulcifer called out to him from behind, the outcome was already decided.

"Wha…!? This is—!?"

The twin swords held by the <EX Wyrm> were cut and moreover the right wrist was destroyed.

One counterattack flash by <Bahamut>'s Divine Raiment, <Reload On Fire>.

He temporarily decelerated his own time and accelerated it up to several times afterwards.

He easily defeated Alterize by using the Divine Raiment of compression strengthening.

"…, b-but!"

Having lost her two weapons, Alterize took distance from Lux.

"It's not over yet!"

Then, she set up a canon with the remaining left arm and tried to continue the battle,

"Alterize-dono."

In a calm voice, Barzeride's <Aži Dahāka> applied its hand on her <EX Wyrm>'s shoulder from behind.

"Eh…?"

Immediately after, light disappeared from the <EX Wyrm>'s armor and Force Core.

Energy consumption or forced system shut down?

In any case, the <EX Wyrm>'s energy rapidly decreased and Alterize knelt down on one knee.

"W-Why did such thing…!? The Machine Dragon's system is—"

As it was an unexpected phenomenon, the calm Alterize showed confusion.

Then, Barzeride talked in a chilly voice.

"I want you to leave this to me. You've no chance of winning now anyway, and above all — at this point when he went easy on you, the outcome is already clear."

"…Kuh!"

It meant that it was because Lux carefully considered her position and pride that he stopped at only one arm's destruction of the <EX Wyrm>.

He went easy on her in respect to a powerful person who entered the top ten in the religious country Ymir.

And in consideration for Krulcifer who was a friend.

Alterize who noticed that reality nodded while grinding her teeth, and withdrew.

"To think that he's really the legendary—"

Was it the true identity of the "Black Hero" who destroyed the Old Empire before?

The owner of legendary strength (class) surpassing that of super first class.

However—,

"Why did he…? For Miss…"

While muttering her doubt, Alterize got away from the abandoned building, thus withdrawing from the front.

Then, with a strange fatigue different from that of the battle, she removed her armor.

"Also, what is this…? This feeling…"

Alterize sat down as such and lost consciousness.

"Be careful, Lux-kun. The ability of that man's <Aži Dahāka> is unknown."

Leaning on the broken wall, Krulcifer called his attention.

"Understood."

At the same time Lux lightly nodded,

"Is your strategy meeting over? Then, I'm coming! " Black Hero"!"

Barzeride kicked the ground and pounced in a straight line.

The wheels of the legs of the ground-type Machine Dragon <Aži Dahāka> rotated at high speed and instantly shortened the distance.

Then, it mowed down the large-sized halberd it held in hands before his eyes.

"……!?"

Lux moved his body backward and dodged it by a hairbreadth; and using the rotation of when he swung completely, Barzeride chased him.

From horizontally mowing down to vertically swinging down.

The moment when the blow, coupled with the iron lump's weight attacked Lux's <Bahamut>,

"<Reload On Fire>"

<Bahamut>'s airframe shone and released an ultra-fast slash.

Divine Raiment of compression strengthening which devours its own time and accelerates several times.

When Lux's swung large sword was about to smash <Aži Dahāka>'s armor,

"Ha…!"

At the same time with a sneer-like voice, the point of that sword cut the sky.

"—!?"

He pretended to swing downward his halberd, and deployed a barrier with the maximum output before Lux.

Blocked by a threefold wall of light, the large sword could not pass through.

Soon after Barzeride received a total of seven flash slashes,

"—Die!"

The halberd tinged with a red light was flung aiming at <Bahamut>'s head.

"Lux!"

Krulcifer's scream came up from far behind.

A roaring sound resounded and the impact shook the atmosphere.

When a thick cloud of dust rose up around, Lux fled to the sky.

"……"

"Hou. So your complexion doesn't even change one bit , even after your Divine Raiment is defeated, huh. As expected of the man called the "Black Hero". But—"

While he was speaking, Lux once again activated < Reload On Fire> and slashed at him.

Instead of waiting for an opportunity to launch a counter; aiming the "Quick slash" which brought down the opponent, he set the first move by himself with an ultra-fast slash.

<Aži Dahāka> generated the threefold power barrier.

Lux loaded energy to the tip of his large sword so as to tear them up one-by-one.

But, unable to break through the last fold of the barrier , he once again retreated to a suitable distance.

"As expected… so that was it."

"Hou. What, you speak as though you understood something. Do you intend to make excuses?"

"<Aži Dahāka>'s Divine Raiment is to steal other Machine Dragons' power, isn't it?"

"____"

At Lux's statement, Barzeride revealed an uncanny look.

"No way…!"

Krulcifer reflexively raised her voice.

"I've also heard rumors about the "Title Holder of the Kingdom". That beside his bold character full of ambition and though originally being a man not having a high Machine Dragon aptitude, he boasts of a threatening endurance."

"But, it is impossible. Without a high Machine Dragon aptitude, energy should have immediately dried out. If he uses a Divine Drag-Ride which has intense consumption, then all the more—"

"Yes. That's why he absorbed power. From the other Machine Dragons and people around. If he can steal energy while fighting, he can compensate for the weakness of exhaustion. And he should probably also be able to steal a Divine Raiment. A little while ago, he was clearly reading my movements."

"…Then, that was my—"

"Yes, he was probably using <Fafnir>'s Divine Raiment, <Wise Blood> that he stole. He steals a Machine Dragon's energy just by getting close, and by touching it, he can temporarily steal even a Divine Drag-Ride's ability and use it. That's the true nature of <Aži Dahāka> 's Divine Raiment — <Avestā>. Isn't it?"

It was probably because of that that Alterize's <EX Wyrm> which withdrew from the front suffered a system shut down, and she also suffered from severe consumption.

"……"

Not denying Lux's answer, even so Barzeride's composed attitude did not collapse.

"Hou, that's a pretty keen reading. I shall praise you for having seeing through it. But — even if you understood it, you can't defeat me after all."

As he suddenly glared at Lux, he activated the <Devil' s Glow>, the canon which was the special armament on the left shoulder.

Its muzzle was turned not to Lux, but to Krulcifer who could not move anymore.

“……!?”

“You wouldn’t be able to prevent it in your weak condition. But, that woman's limbs will become somewhat crippled, however I don’t care at all.”

Simultaneously with a mocking voice, the shelling was shot.

“Kuh—!”

Lux appeared before <Fafnir> and prevented it with a barrier at max power.

A roaring sound and explosive flames.

Lux who put himself in this vortex noticed an abnormality.

The wire tail which <Aži Dahāka> had at hand twined around <Bahamut>’s right hand.

“You fell for it. “Black Hero”.”

"Lux-kun…!"

At the same time when Krulcifer raised her voice, Lux cut the wire tail with his large sword.

But, if we consider this as a contact between Machine Dragons, then…

"Oops. Sorry, but — it's too late. With this, I've obtained the Divine Raiment that your <Bahamut> possesses."

Barzeride threw away the cut wire tail and revealed a wicked smile.

The reason why he aimed at Krulcifer was to make Lux create an opening.

"……"

"You false Prince and self-proclaimed Hero. I'll now end your meaningless struggle."

<Aži Dahāka>'s armor feet firmly stepped on the devastated ground of the abandoned building.

With steps convinced of his victory, he intentionally gained time, thus applying a strong pressure on Lux.

"You'll die if we fight like this, but are you still fine with it? If you beg for your life and admit defeat, then I may overlook you here."

Like a sweet temptation, Barzeride said to Lux.

But,

"You're lying."

Lux, far from shaking, showed no opening at all and stared at Barzeride.

"What…!?"

Within a desperate situation, even judging from Krulcifer, where <Reload On Fire>, the Divine Raiment he mastered in order to become the strongest was stolen and his energy got absorbed by <Aži Dahāka>, Lux was smiling.

He said in a cold voice and with cold eyes enough to give a chill to those seeing it.

"After Alterize-san concluded the engagement and returned to her country, you're going to use your subordinates and attack by surprise, right? A more certain method as to not get your hands dirty. —I'm getting really tired of seeing it, Barzeride. Of that way of doing things exactly the same as the Old Empire's royalties, that is."

"……"

At that attitude completely different from the usual Lux's, Barzeride fell silent just for a moment.

"Ku… Hahahahaha!"

Then, he suddenly burst into laughter.

"I see, you're an interesting man. All right, "Black Hero!" Show me what you can do in this situation by struggling and entertaining me as much as possible!"

<Aži Dahāka>'s airframe wore a pale light.

At the same time, Lux's <Bahamut> kicked the ground and charged at it.

With a blade clad in energy and while twisting his body, Lux slashed at Barzeride.

However,

"After rattling so much, is it only this level?"

As expected, he couldn't completely cut through <Aži Dahāka>'s threefold barrier which was firmly stretched.

Before reaching the opponent's armor, the power was suppressed and the blade of the large sword was flipped along.

"Then, allow me to attack now. <Reload On Fire>!"

"……!"

Immediately after, <Reload On Fire> stolen by <Aži Dahāka>'s Divine Raiment <Avestā> activated.

The halberd was swung at a speed which the eyes could not catch, and <Bahamut> was blown away.

"Kuh…!"

He violently struck a pillar remaining to the abandoned building and crashed into a mountain of rubble.

Going after him, Barzeride accelerated <Aži Dahāka>'s wheels.

"Kukuku! This power is splendid!"

Raising a cry of delight, Barzeride started pursuit.

A super acceleration that was several times faster after having decelerated his own time up to a fraction.

Through the ability to see everything that was polished in thousands of battles, Lux evaded the attack and aimed at Barzeride's chest, but after having stopped it with his tenacious armor and barrier, Barzeride released continuous attacks.

On the other hand, with an enemy strengthened with <Reload On Fire> as opponent, Lux also could not use quick slash.

Even when letting out a counterattack by attacking the opening at Barzeride's <Reload On Fire>, Lux's attacks were all blocked by <Aži Dahāka>'s threefold barrier.

"But, this ability to accelerate time is really difficult. Even if I have it, it looks like it's impossible to master it immediately."

When Barzeride sighed like so, he suddenly reduced his speed.

Perhaps because fatigue spouted out at the same time, <Aži Dahāka>'s threefold barrier became thin.

"……!"

At that moment, Lux glided and let out a high-speed thrust.

The moment when energy was concentrated at the tip of the large sword, and looked like it could pierce the wall in a one point breakthrough,

"—You fool."

At the same time with Barzeride's fearless smile, an unusual phenomenon occurred.

The threefold barrier which became thin and weak increased in thickness and shine just before Lux's sword touched it and, far from preventing the sword's hit, flicked off <Bahamut> itself that had rushed.

"Guhah…!?"

Being instantly blown away dozens of Mel to the rear, Lux struck his back on the debris.

Though the armor did not break, his charge at full power was repelled and a faint groan leaked out.

"Kukuku, it seems that I' am able to master this Divine Raiment. "Black Hero"."

"No way…, did he strengthen the Machine Dragon's barrier?"

Krulcifer who saw that muttered in blank amazement.

<Reload On Fire> was a Divine Raiment of compression strengthening.

Lux used it in time acceleration by predicting with his superhuman reading and attack movement, but it looked

like Barzeride used it to compressed strengthen <Aži Dahāka>'s threefold barrier.

If he did future foresight several seconds ahead, using <Fafnir>'s Divine Raiment <Wise Blood> at the same time, he would be able to attack with the strengthened threefold barrier at the moment of the hit.

Normally speaking, having used his power to that extent, if he were to go as far as simultaneously use the Divine Raiment, an unimaginable burden and fatigue would be put on the user and he would immediately run out of power.

But, Barzeride enabled continuous actions by stealing Machine Dragon energy from Lux.

Therefore, escaping from <Avestā>'s striking range was the best plan, but—

"—Why does he not escape…?"

Krulcifer already understood the reason.

If Lux were to take distance and gain time, Barzeride would probably attack Krulcifer again.

Precisely because of that, she did not understand.

About why Lux went as far as to reveal his true identity as the “Black Hero” and was fighting for someone unrelated to him.

『That is Nii-san’s good point, but also his bad point.

When thinking so, a voice reached Krulcifer through dragon voice.

The voice of Airi, Lux’s little sister.

『You are—

『Please, act as if you have not yet noticed. Krulcifer-san.

Airi told in a very calm voice.

『Right now, Nii-san’s plan is being implemented, so please wait only a little. And then—

Airi exhaled and told.

『Please watch it without losing consciousness. That fighting for your sake—

Part 3

They crossed swords about ten times.

Slashes at a speed which the eyes couldn't catch were mercilessly damaging <Bahamut>'s armor.

"Haa… Haa…"

Each time, getting his energy absorbed by <Aži Dahāka>, Lux's breathing became rough.

Even so, he was keeping a match on equal terms with Barzeride who was using <Reload On Fire> which he wasn't used to, but Lux's body was also finally reaching its limit.

"—Kuh!"

Along with Lux's breathing becoming rough, even <Bahamut>'s airframe began to gradually shake with a rattling sound.

"So the omen of rampage has come. The conclusion is near, "Black Hero"."

Barzeride who struck a smile approached Lux with a composed expression.

He foresaw that with the attack of Lux who lost < Reload On Fire>, he would no longer be able to break through <Aži Dahāka>'s threefold barrier.

"Isn't it time to admit your defeat already? "Black Hero."

While continuing fighting, Barzeride interjected in an amazed tone.

"Since it's a rare opportunity, I'll tell you something good. As a Prince, you seem to be fighting for atonement — but such a thing is just a vain effort. No, I should say it has the opposite effect."

"……"

Lux, confronting him, kept silent.

While breathing with his shoulders moving up and down, Barzeride calmly stared at him.

"I… The "Title Holder of the Kingdom" am trying to save this country's future. Do you know? Lux Acadia.

The crisis which is approaching this country currently — something called the Ragnarok."

"—I know."

Lux answered briefly.

The negative legacy of the Old Empire, together with the other countries of major powers it was soon going to befall as the New Kingdom's misfortune. After waking up, he heard about it from Lisha.

Also about the fact that the New Kingdom's Prime Minister issued instructions; so as to stop anything which could cause harm to Barzeride.

"Then, it saves me the long talk. There are no Drag-Knights appropriate for subjugation with that monster as the opponent at this time in the New Kingdom. Except me, that is."

Barzeride raised his voice so that even Krulcifer could hear.

"I'm saying that in order to save this New Kingdom, I will be fighting that monster. Therefore, it's necessary to obtain further military power from the ruins. So, it's

necessary for me to marry that girl. And from here on, I must use that woman as soon as possible, let scholars check her body in various ways and dig up new weapons and technology from ruins."

"……!?"

Krulcifer hearing that revealed a scared expression.

"Fallen Prince. If it's you, you should understand, right? This is something necessary. It's for the future of the New Kingdom. There is no victory without sacrifice. With one girl of a foreign country coming over to me, this country will be saved. Even so, are you saying that you'll still get in my way? After having failed to save this country, are you once again going to plunge this country into a crisis?"

"……"

Listening to the speech full of deceptions, Krulcifer's expression became cloudy.

Barzeride was trying to break Krulcifer's heart by using Lux.

In order to throw her into despair and make her yield, he was telling Lux himself to abandon her.

There is nobody who will save you.

Lux knew it and took a posture of resistance. At that time—,

"It's fine already, Lux-kun."

"…Krulcifer-san?"

To Lux's roughly breathing, Krulcifer plainly said.

"It's enough already. You have properly accomplished my request."

"That's not true. It isn't over ye—"

"No, it's fine. Since it is now, I will tell you — but I was using you. It is only with this intention that I approached you from the start. That's why you no longer need to feel either responsibility or obligation."

Krulcifer revealed her usual cool smile and continued.

"That's why, give up already. You should not have to die in such a place. You will fight for a country that is your ideal, right?"

With thoughts like vomiting blood, Krulcifer span her words.

That she wanted him to abandon her.

With an ice-like expression, she continued so.

"For me, you were just a tool. Therefore, I want you to say so, too. That you are a tool… If I had explained so from the start, it would've ended without expecting something like "maybe". I wouldn't have ended with such thought, so—"

- plop*

A single tear drop, as she was not able to bear it, streamed down Krulcifer's cheek.

The solitary, noble, and icy girl.

Something that she, who kept on smiling without revealing to anyone any weakness, truly desired.

Perhaps, we might be able to become a family.

She had kept fighting alone with only one thought in her heart.

『If you had became the Prince of the New Kingdom, would you also have saved me?

Now, he clearly understood the true feelings that Krulcifer was hiding.

That's why Lux asserted.

"You're— my lover. So, I will definitely save you."

Then, he turned to Barzeride and glared at him.

"Hou, even though you've no chance of winning, you still want to continue? Your so-called "lover", she doesn't seem to want that, though. In the first place, how do you intend to save the New Kingdom from the crisis after defeating me?"

"I'll look for someone more suitable than you and persuade him. If I don't find anyone — at that time, I'll go out."

Shaking the large sword, Lux declared.

"Why…"

Lux looked back again at Krulcifer whose eyes were moist, and smiled.

"It's because I also want to be taught how to study by Krulcifer-san again. You were very kind to me. I want to be your strength. Please let me fight. For you who is important to me—"

Then, he turned his bottomless gray pupils that those who saw them felt fear, towards Barzeride.

"—It's a match, Barzeride."

The only wish which he swore in his younger days.

In order to achieve it, he had killed his self and sharpened his sword to the utmost limit.

Lux's <Bahamut> which was gradually shaking further creaked.

The lines carved on the airframe were tinged with red light as if it was on the brink of collapse, showing signs of rampaging.

Shaking the shoulders so as to repress it, Lux brandished the large sword.

“Ha! How foolish. Your boring talk—”

At that moment, Lux moved while muttering.

<Bahamut>, who was shaking until just now on the verge of rampage so far shone red and swung the sword.

But,

“Fool! As if you can break this barrier with your power !”

Suddenly, the special armament possessed by <Fafnir> , the <Auto Shield> built a shield barrier in front of <Aži Dahāka>.

“…!? You stole even my special armament!?”

<Aži Dahāka>'s Divine Raiment which had been hidden until now.

An ability which temporarily stole even the right of control of a Machine Dragons' special armaments.

From there, Barzeride furthermore activated <Reload On Fire>.

The absolute defense <Auto Shield> and the threefold barrier where the compression was strengthened.

The armor of the title holder that had never received one scratch not only in the tournament of the Capital, but even with an Abyss or a Divine Drag-Ride as opponents.

He intended to block Lux's sword with that absolute shield.

"Die! You Fallen Prince and self-proclaimed Hero!"

When he saw through the moment of the attack with the future foresight by <Wise Blood> and the barrier strengthened with <Reload On Fire> was about to crush Lux—,

"I don't want to become a Hero. But—"

Lux's mutter quietly echoed at the moment of crossing under the moon.

"At that time, from that day when I swore to destroy the Empire — I had already made the resolution to fight. "

Bikiiiiiiiiiiiiiih!

A dissonant sound which informed of the collapse (of a collapse, but it's not a physical collapse right it's metaphorical) echoed in the church site at night.

"—Wha!?"

Lux's slash, coupled with a spin, was sharply released.

That flash in no way inferior to the Quick Draw in speed easily flipped the shield of the <Auto Shield> on all four sides, easily pierced the threefold barrier several times strengthened and hit directly <Aži Dahāka> which boasted of its hard armor.

"Gu, gyaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaah!"

A shock, like that of hundreds of millions of needles, spreading from the point of contact of the blade which touched the top of the shoulder broke through and the Machine Dragon began to collapse.

The mountain of rubble behind and even the hard ground of the wasteland were also smashed up by the aftereffect of the shock.

Barzeride who was in the middle of that destroyed space gushed blood from his whole body, vomited blood and fainted in agony.

"Impossible..! Why is such a thing…, such a thinnnnnnnnnggg?"

Barzeride who screamed as he was in agony, nonetheless struggled to wield the halberd.

But, the brandished halberd and even the <Devil's Glow> of both shoulders activated, then cracked and simultaneously broke into pieces.

Be it his Drag-Ride or Divine Raiment, all of these were lost.

『Shall I tell you? Lord Kreutzer

To <Aži Dahāka> which received a fatal destruction, Airi sent her voice through the dragon voice

『This is — the second hidden technique that Nii-san created, "Recoil Burst". A special ultra-move where he intentionally lets his own Machine Dragon rampage and releases it against the burden of just before self-destruction.

Recoil Burst was a skill released by an approach completely opposite to that of the Quick Draw which combined two operating systems simultaneously.

A hidden technique which creates the accumulation of utmost limits by restraining, through one's own mind processing, an action at full power by body manipulation .

An attack at full power and the order to stop it.

It originally releases an ultra-powerful blow which is contradictorily performed through powerful operation at the same time as the Machine Dragon was intentionally allowed to rampage.

A forbidden technique where, if he could not perfectly perform the braking of energy flowing from the Force Core, <Bahamut>'s power would go on a rampage midway, and he would expose his surroundings and even his body to the danger of death.

That power boasted of a power dozens of times that of an normal blow released at full power.

Thus, it was able to destroy even <Aži Dahāka>'s " wall" equipped with the special armament of absolute defense and a strong barrier in one blow.

"D-Don't be kidding me! As if such thing could happen! Such a—, *gobo*! Something like this!"

"The match is already over. But—"

Lux calmly said, and stared at Barzeride's face at last.

"If you intend to interfere with her again or anyone of the academy any more, then I'll have no mercy. — Can you promise that?"

"…Ku! Hahahahaha!"

Barzeride who heard that leapt back with an ugly smile.

Iiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiih!

The partially destroyed <Aži Dahāka> raised a harsh roar.

"That just now—"

"Kukukuku…! It's just a signal. To my private army — my subordinates; Drag-Knights deployed to disperse the surrounding neighborhood from the duel, that is!"

"…Does that mean that you had planned that from the beginning?"

Lux calmly stared at Barzeride and asked so.

Since Alterize fainted midway, there was no eyewitness.

If he disposed of even Lux saying it was by an unfortunate accident, he could threaten Krulcifer and kept her quiet.

He had prepared the place of the duel with that intention from the beginning.

"This is also a splendid plan, Hero. Matches are such things! The "Title Holder of the Kingdom" can't afford to lose! Even you, a Prince of the Empire, should know that!"

Barzeride revealed a triumphant smile.

Lux who used his hidden technique and Krulcifer's stamina had already exceeded their limits.

They should have no spare energy to further defeat Barzeride's private army from here.

The last plan considered so.

"I know. After all the Old Empire's way of doing, I saw it enough times that I got disgusted when I was a child."

"Kukukuku…, so that's what you mean by you've resolved yourself, huh? Well then—"

The moment when Barzeride was about to send a dragon voice, or send a message through the dragon voice to his private army—

"—Are these guys your private soldiers that you talked about? They're quite reliable people, eh."

"*Gefuuh*…!"

- gashan*. A man wearing an <EX Wyvern> was thrown down near Lux and company from the sky.

"What…!?"

When Barzeride looked up at the sky with his eyes wide opened, a giant red dragon was there.

The New Kingdom Princess Lisha and her Divine Drag-Ride <Tiamat>.

One of the prominent strong persons (individuals) even in the Royal Military Academy was staying in the sky where clouds floated.

"Where did the other guys go!? There should have been 50 machines including mercenaries! I must quickly make them—"

"Lu-chan, are you all right?"

In response to Barzeride's shout, a dull voice came from behind.

"Wha…!"

Having appeared carrying dozens of private soldiers whose armors were cancelled was Philphie wearing the Divine Drag-Ride <Typhon>.

"Sorry, but I will have you tell me all your evil plots, Lord Kreutzer."

In addition, Sharis wearing a <Wyvern> declared so.

"Yes. Well, you can't make excuse at this late hour. I also heard it. Resign yourself."

Tillfarr with a <Wyrm> consented, and Nokuto who was behind her also put up her Machine Dragon's arm.

"Yes. With the monitoring function of my <Drake>, I recorded the conversation within range. About how you had threatened Krulcifer-san, a student of the academy. The suspicion of having employed thieves. And the suspicion of the rules violation of the duel as well as the attempt to kill your opponent intentionally. We had the people of the army you brought along confirmed all of this, so—"

"U, gu… uh!"

Sharis's father was a soldier of the New Kingdom and he acted as vice-commandant.

Using that connection, she requested the guards of the Fort City to tag along and had them standby in the neighborhood.

In order to avoid interference, Barzeride deployed his private soldiers and had them dispersed people from the duel place, but those obstacles were easily broken through by Lisha and Philphie.

“Give up, “Title Holder of the Kingdom”.”

Lisha wearing <Tiamat> solemnly told so from the sky .

“—Fu”

It was no longer Barzeride’s personal problem.

While being aware of his defeat, he executed his last action.

<Aži Dahāka> which already lost all its weapons turned its back to Lux and the others and started running .

“Wait! Are you trying to run away!?”

A dense forest spread immediately near the church site .

Had he also prepared an escape course?

Did he intend to escape from the Fort City, go back to his territory and leave everything unsettled using his influence?

Or, live under an organization outside the country and plan his revenge?

When he set up this match,

“—Too naïve.”

A translucent voice and a gunshot resounded in the church site.

“Guh…!”

Immediately after, the shooting of <Fafnir>’s special armament, the <Freezing Canon> froze <Aži Dahāka>’s armor.

“Krulcifer…san!?”

Lux stared in wonder at the very precise shot of the girl whom he thought had run out of strength long ago.

"I said, right? That you should not underestimate me."

Showing her usual cool smile, she muttered as if speaking to herself.

Krulcifer had the highest Machine Dragon aptitude value in the academy.

If she could prevent even the absorption of energy by <Aži Dahāka>, it would mean that she had accumulated enough power to be able to shoot back once.

<Aži Dahāka> which had already received fatal damage fell and completely shattered; and the user Barzeride lost consciousness.

"In the end, you are the only person who did not abandon me until the end."

She suddenly showed a somewhat farsighted profile to Lux and continued.

Barzeride, who, though evaluating the girl called Krulcifer as the "best tool", threw her away and fled.

"That isn't true."

The moment when she showed her sentimental side, Lux suddenly smiled at Krulcifer.

"…Eh?"

"When I said that I will go to the duel, everybody cooperated. Lisha-sama, Philphie and even every one of the Triad… So—"

As Lux looked at Lisha who landed next to him and said so,

"Is that right…?"

"Errr, well yes…"

Lisha who was suddenly accosted slightly blushed and averted her gaze.

"It seems that I got you to cooperate even when you saved me the other day. Besides — it was Lux's request after all. With that said, I beat that man's private soldiers, so from tomorrow when the request will be over, give him back to me."

"It's me who beat more than half though."

When Philphie muttered so behind her, "Ah geez, shut up!" shouted Lisha and dodged it.

Krulcifer seeing that chuckled.

As both of them cancelled their armors, Lux took Krulcifer's hand.

"Well then, shall we return? To our academy."

"Yes."

Thus, this incident calmly came to a close.

Epilogue – The Girl's Wish

"Nii-san. Please come out. —Nii-san?"

knock-knock. The door of one room of the girl's dormitory was lightly knocked on.

When Lux slightly opened his eyes from within a deep catnap, the furniture of the usual two person room came into view.

Today was a holiday.

"Sorry, Airi… As expected today, I'm a little tired—"

When Lux unusually tried to escape into the blanket as he said so,

"—Do you not mind even if I expose to every one of the class that you are sleeping with Philphie-san, Nii-san ?"

"……!?"

Hearing a devilish voice, Lux quickly sprang up.

When he hurriedly opened the room's door, Airi with a serious look came in.

"You know… Airi. That kind of joke is bad for my heart, so could you stop it?"

"I was serious though?"

"……"

Being said with a carefree smile, Lux became speechless.

"Lately, you rely too much on me, Nii-san. Even for the matter before, I was against it, you know? But Nii-san said he will do it no matter what, so I had no choice but to accept—"

"Ah, I really appreciate it. Thank you, Airi."

On that day, after having come back from the ruins investigations.

Lux predicted the situation where Krulcifer would want to go to the duel alone, and asked Airi beforehand so as to stop it.

In other words, the sleeping effect of the medicine that Airi concocted was just a little.

Even so, Airi, also thinking about Lux's safety, was hesitant about what to do until the end.

"I'm always worried, and you don't even consider my feelings…"

"Eh?"

Being asked by Lux after she said that in a subdue voice, Airi answered "I-It's nothing!" in panic.

"To begin with, what is this? To think you have forgotten about asking me, your little sister's help to choose an outfit for a date —"

"S-Sorry. Since it's just after yesterday, and now today, so I'm a little tired… Or rather, it isn't a date."

"It's something similar, right?"

Airi muttered somewhat displeased,

"Well, please change your clothes quickly. There's no time, isn't there?"

As she smoothly brushed that away, she said so and urged Lux.

After wearing the clothes which Krulcifer had bought for him and having Airi checked them, Lux left the girl's dormitory.

Near the school gate, Krulcifer wearing a light blue dress was standing.

"Well then, shall we go? I called a carriage for today, so—"

As expected, flying with Machine Dragons would be boorish and since both them piled up fatigue, they could also not do that.

"Hey, you two, wait a minute!"

When they were about to get on the carriage as planned, Lisha came over before the school gate.

"Huh? What's the matter, Lisha-sama?"

Even though you should usually be in your atelier — Lux looked puzzled.

"I'm also going with you. You're going to meet with that butler of the Einvolk House, right? You two don't have your Sword Devices with you, so you'll need an escort, right?"

On the waist of Lisha who said so, there was a Sword Device hanging.

"I-It's indeed so, but—"

"Ah, you know? Lisha-sama said that she was concerned about your relationship."

Before they were aware, Tillfarr who came over to see them off declared with an innocent smile.

"Y-You fool! Don't say things that could be misunderstood! I just—"

When Lisha who saw that desperately tried to smooth it over, Krulcifer chuckled.

"Then, I shall gratefully take you upon your offer."

"Y-Yes… That's right."

When Lux awkwardly nodded, the three of them got on to the carriage.

The destination was a high-class commercial district which was originally designated for concluding the engagement.

Perhaps because it was a holiday, the streets seen from the window of the carriage were very bright and lively.

As if to heal the wounds and fatigue of last night's duel, Lux was looking at the flowing scenery.

—That evening, when all was settled.

The Heir of one of the Four Great Nobles, Barzeride Kreutzer was accused of crime and the matter had not yet been publically announced.

It seemed that Barzeride arranged bandits disguise as private soldiers behind his father's and family's back and was working in the shadows to allow illegal digging at the ruins and apply pressure to the opposition.

No — they did not know whether it was really by Barzeride's individual decision, but anyway, after all the

investigations were over, it was a fact that he would be obviously sentenced to heavy punishment and imprisoned.

Then, about the Black Hero's true identity.

The case where it was known that Lux was <Bahamut >'s user seemed to have been kept secret by Queen Raffi' s management.

Either way, as for Barzeride's crimes, however much power of the Four Great Nobles he held, he would not come out for at least five years.

(That in itself isn't particularly worrisome, but—)

There was no horn for summoning the Abyss in Barzeride's possession.

But, it was an undeniable fact that the Diabolos had intentionally been summoned before the ruins at that time.

In other words, it was very likely that there was an existence suggesting Barzeride's actions and manipulating the Abyss behind the scenes.

It was still unknown whether it was Lux's brother of the Empire — Fugil whom he was pursuing though.

"We have already arrived."

"Ah…"

While he was lost in thought, they seemed to have arrived at the destination.

A high-class restaurant where it was scheduled to talk about the matter of the engagement.

As they got down from the carriage, they went in the restaurant along with Alterize who was in front of a shop .

As a reservation had been done beforehand, there was only the female owner inside.

"Welcome, Miss, Lux Acadia-sama and, errr—?"

Alterize, in the middle of greetings, turned her eyes next to Lux.

For a woman butler with an upright character, she revealed an unusual troubled expression.

"I'm their escort. Is there any problem?"

"N-No, excuse me…"

"Hmm. Well, since I came until here, you won't be attacked by assassins. I'll stand guard outside."

Perhaps because she was being unusually considerate, Lisha went out of the shop.

As she sat on a seat and coughed once, Alterize straightened herself and bowed her head.

"The matter this time. It is my responsibility for having tried to press the engagement forward without seeing through Lord Kreutzer's scheme. I also do not know how to apologize to Miss and Lux Acadia-sama. Since I will receive a severe punishment upon my return to the Einvolk House, in this place, I implore your pardon…"

"……"

Lux and Krulcifer who saw that hesitated for a little while.

Though Lux had heard from Krulcifer, she seemed to have the position of an orphan taken in the Einvolk House.

This was probably the result of devoting her loyalty in her own way and executing an order.

Lux could not bring himself to especially blame her.

"Krulcifer-san…"

As Lux thought so and turned his sights next to him,

"Can you raise your head? It is embarrassing to lower one's head inside a shop after all."

Krulcifer answered with a cool face.

At first glance, it looked like a cold attitude until very recently, but her tone was gentle.

"As for the matter this time, I am also at fault. You also have it hard, Alterize. So — we are even. There is no need to apologize."

Only just a little, the two girls' gazes crossed and a calm silence was born.

Alterize adopted by the head butler of the Einvolk House from an orphanage.

And Krulcifer dragged in as a lineage of the ruins.

Lux seeing this actually felt that the two girls with similar circumstances that were working hard could surely get along well.

It was above all a happy thing.

"Those words are waste to me. But — my mission is already as good as settled, too."

Then, Alterize suddenly said such a thing.

"Eh?"

Lux and Krulcifer looking puzzled simultaneously raised their voices.

"Lux Acadia-sama's ability as a Drag-Knight and his wisdom of having seen Lord Kreutzer's conspiracy and

broken the trap. I certainly witnessed them. Moreover, he is acknowledged by the New Kingdom's Queen and had connections with many feudal lords and nobles. The Head of our Einvolk House will surely judge you to be suitable as the fiancé, too."

"…Eh!? Errr—"

The moment when he saw Alterize's modest smile, Lux was perplexed.

Confused, he whispered in a low voice into the ear of Krulcifer who was beside him.

"…Wait, Krulcifer-san. What does this mean? Haven't you told her yet!? About our relation — being an act."

"I did not have time for that. That's why I intended to tell her now, but—"

Perhaps because it was unexpected, Krulcifer who was also somewhat flustered replied.

"U-Um, Alterize-san… I-I, um—"

"Please rest assured. From here on, it is my job. I will put all my soul into recommend you by all means as the fiancé to my master, the Head of the Einvolk House."

"Eeeeeeeeeeeeh!? W-Wait, that's—!"

"Well then — I shall take my leave. I have already dealt with the bill for dinner, so you two, please take your time. It is the least I can do to apologize."

When briefly saying so, Alterize calmly left her seat.

"Well then, excuse me. Miss—. I will visit you someday again"

"You, too — stay well."

Alterize returned a bow to Krulcifer's gentle smile.

Her gesture had already returned to the usual serene one, but a smile which hid something floated on her expression.

"—Ah, please wait! Alterize-sa…"

When Lux unintentionally tried to chase her, it was already too late.

"She's gone. Even if she returns to Ymir, it will be good if she also does well there."

"That's right—…. Not that, what do we do!? About the matter of the engagement!"

"If Lux-kun is fine with it, I do not mind officially concluding an engagement."

When Krulcifer said so with a mischievous smile, Lux' s face turned red.

"P-Please don't tease me. Besides, the request will be over soon, so—"

"You're right — with this, the contract with you will also be over for the time being."

The special request made on a whim by Principal Relie .

Exactly one week has passed since that day, and Krulcifer's request was about to end.

Krulcifer's request saying "I want you to become my lover".

Lux was troubled in various ways as she was his first experience, but—

(Did I properly accomplish it?)

As her request was about to end, Lux felt a little lonely .

"I might not have been the suitable person for it, but it was fun."

He turned a gentle smile to Krulcifer.

Though that was without doubt Lux's true feelings,

"That's right. But sorry — as expected I am not really fond of indecisive men."

"Eh…?"

"Being "lovers" with you for one week, I once again realized it."

"Ah, Hahaha…"

Revealing a slightly bitter face, Lux laughed.

(I-It's unexpectedly painful to hear that!)

He was originally a fake lover, so he understood that it would turn out like this, but—

Krulcifer softly drew her face to the mug of Lux hanging his head depressed.

"But, the real you is quite a coercive person. So — I like the coercive you very much."

"Eh…? —"

The moment when Lux raised his face to Krulcifer's whisper, his lips were blocked (locked).

The smell of a high-class perfume and the feel of sweet , soft lips.

"Wai…!?"

At the kiss with just a little bit of touching, Lux's body suddenly turned red.

"It is a little expression of my gratitude for handling my request. —Isn't it enough?"

Though a cool expression as usual, Krulcifer's cheeks also turned slightly red.

"S-Such a thing—"

"Then, again—"

Krulcifer once again kissed the confused Lux as if pecking repeatedly.

When she finally let go, she stuck out her tongue and licked her lips.

"T-The shopkeeper is looking!? Krulcifer-san!?"

"I don't lose anything, so it's fine, isn't it? If Lux-kun really accept to get engaged with me — I do not mind continuing this."

When Krulcifer softly ran her fingertip on the cheek of Lux, who was already completely confused,

"Hey! What are you guys doing!?"

Lisha barged into the store, she interrupted in a panic.

"It can't be helped, huh. Well then, think about the engagement talk."

"Eh…? Hey! Explain Lux!? What does she mean by engagement!?"

"P-Please wait a little! This is, um—"

The busy daily life returned to the Fort City.

Side Story – The Little Sister Airi's Big Brother Observation Diary

Part 1

I, Airi Acadia, former Imperial Princess, have a little daily routine.

That is writing a diary.

Since no one knows when what misfortune may befall him, and also for the sake of my only brother, I must constantly leave records behind.

I sit at a desk in my room of the girl's dormitory where everyone has fell asleep, and I am silently writing down characters on a paper.

"Airi is really meticulous as usual."

When I am writing a diary in front of a lamp, I heard Nokuto's voice from the top of the bunk bed.

"Sorry. Were you not able to sleep?"

I looked back in the direction of the voice and turned my face to the black-haired girl.

My classmate Nokuto Leaflet is my roommate who perfectly gives the impression of a "calm maid".

"No. You do not need to mind me. But, staying up late is bad for the body."

"It's all right. Just a little more and I will finish."

While being thankful for her consideration, I straighten my back and turned to the diary.

"Anyway, is that story true?"

I was a little concerned by a certain rumor which I heard from my classmates during the daytime.

『—It seems that Lux-senpai, the only male of the academy already has someone he likes.

No way, was what I answered then.

When it comes to Nii-san, that blockhead and ignorant of a girl's goodwill, there is no way that such a thing is possible.

Well, appearance-wise, I also think that he's kind of cool and gentle, but in my opinion, he has many troublesome sides.

He is a person who cannot turn down a girl's request, he is relatively defenseless and easily deceived and when push comes to shove, he acts without thinking of prior consequences.

Therefore, it is necessary that I look carefully at him.

What a worrisome brother. Even being set up with a strange rumor that he has someone he loves in the academy—

….No way, there isn't really anyone, is there?

That Nii-san, having someone he likes…

"—That's right."

It may also be good to observe Nii-san for two or three days in order to confirm this rumor.

Yes, let's do so.

I should exercise tact as much as Nii-san is careless.

I decide so and ran the pen in the diary continuing the record.

With a slightly mischievous heart, I decided to write the title of the next day ahead.

『Nii-san observation diary』

Part 2

Early morning of the next day. I went to the room where Nii-san is staying.

This is — just in order to observe Nii-san who is in the academy, it is not something to feel ashamed about.

It is an assignment which I choose on my own.

Doing investigations, analyses and recordings is the work which I, a civil official, choose on my own.

"Nii-san. I'm coming in."

After lightly knocking twice, I said so.

This is in order to check Nii-san's attitude, so there will be no meaning if it is not a surprise attack.

When I pretended to not have been on time and opened door, I came across an outrageous scene there.

"……!?"

A lightly dressed girl who is sleeping under the bunk bed and Nii-san who extended both his hands to her body.

For an instance, it looks like Nii-san is playing a prank on the sleeping girl, and my face cannot help but get hot.

"U-Um—, Airi. Errr, this is…"

Seeing Nii-san who became incoherent, I settled down at once.

"Were you trying to wake Philphie-senpai?"

I, who arrived at that conclusion, speak amazed as usual.

"Ah, yes. That's right… Philphie doesn't wake up at all—"

"I will wake her, so Nii-san, please go look out the window and stay still."

Saying so, I shake and wake the half-asleep Philphie-san.

On a closer look, her pajamas are messy and her bare breasts also shook.

Even I of the same sex had my eyes attracted by their overwhelming volume.

I wonder why they are so big…

"Fuhaa…, morning, Airi-chan."

As she notices me, Philphie-san lightly rubs the corner of her eye and does a small yawn.

Her slow gestures, even seeing from me (point of view) who is younger, is very lovely.

No way — is Philphie-san the rumored "lover"?

Philphie-san is Nii-san's childhood friend.

Besides, by Principal Relie's arrangement, they are living while sharing a room like this—

"…Nii-san. You don't do strange things with Philphie-san, do you?"

"W-We don't do such things! There is no free room right now, so we have no other alternative—"

Nii-san, averting his eyes from us, says with his face red.

"Ah, Lu-chan, morning, too."

On the other hand, Philphie-san was also leisurely as usual.

I feel relieved inwardly.

There was no lovers atmosphere between those two yet.

"Well then, I shall take my leave. I had business with you, but it looks like I am in your way now."

After Philphie-san finished changing her clothes, I say so and leave the room.

I don't think that those two currently have a relationship beyond that of childhood friends, but there are a young man and woman.

Yes. From now on, I should also be careful of them after all.

Taking note as such in my mind, I attended the class on that day.

Also afterwards—, from the short break between lessons until after school, my "observation" continued.

Though there is also no end to the students who request odd jobs to Nii-san, he is so overly busy that there are few girls who can spend intimate time with him .

However, while advancing my investigation, I found several people who require attention among them.

The Drag-Rides' atelier located in the school premises.

I peek into the place where Nii-san is doing the odd job of Machine Dragon maintenance and confirmed it.

One of them is the New Kingdom's First Princess, Lizsharte Atismata.

She is a second-year senpai who ties her blond hair to the side, and a Princess with an outstanding talent as a Drag-Knight as well as an engineer.

She is quite fond of Nii-san since that incident (incident of the Abyss surprise in vol.1) and she bears good will towards him.

During the absence of the third-years, she tried to persuade Nii-san to join the "Knight Squadron", and has also taken various assertive and conspicuous actions using her power as a Princess.

Even so, since she is not very understanding of the essential approach part of love, it is probably all right.

Trying to attract Nii-san's attention, she does it only about Drag-Ride's development… I wonder what she has in her mind.

However, from what I see, she is deeply in love with Nii-san, so I must pay attention to her.

Another one is a daughter of an Earl, Krulcifer Einvolk .

She is a very beautiful person and I am sometimes fascinated by her.

She is a foreign student of the religious country Ymir, and a talented woman who possesses both a refined demeanor and a high ability in literary and military arts.

She also often teases Nii-san and he is completely sucked up into her pace.

And for some reason, she also seems to be interested in Nii-san; and she come speaking to him whenever she finds an opportunity.

Since she is a clever person, in a sense, she may be the most dangerous.

But, she does not seem to have that much interest in Nii-san as a member of the opposite sex, and since there is no way for Nii-san to be able to court her, it's probably all right, I guess.

"…Phew, so I guess that's it for the time being."

I confirmed all the possible candidates likely to be Nii-san's "loved one".

It was just a rumor after all.

I heave a sigh of relief and returns to the girl's dormitory.

However, when I share a table with my classmates for the supper of that day—

"Ah, speaking of which, Airi-chan. Yesterday, I saw Lux-senpai buy a present."

"Eeh…!?"

I was so surprised that I almost spat out the water I was drinking.

That was really close. The impression of an Ojou-sama that I have built so far was about to be ruined.

"…Wasn't it something purchased due to an odd jobs request?"

Nii-san has the obligation to receive the requests of students in this academy.

It seems that there are so many requests that he can't readily receive them all now, but—

"No, it seems to be for a present. The shopkeeper is from the personnel of my mercantile house; he said so."

"I-I see…"

Nii-san is basically poor, so the problem is how he managed to get the money. Though I have an idea of people who will lend him money—, the possibility of it being the Principal is the highest right now.

No — more importantly.

"So, what did my brother buy?"

"I heard that it was a rose perfume. And — it looks like the person he will give it to is Sharis-senpai. Ah, I'm envious. To get a present from Lux-senpai—"

"…Is that true?"

I ask while being inwardly shocked.

Through my relationship with Nokuto who is a friend of Senpai, I know that the third-year Sharis-senpai really loves rose flowers.

When coupled with the borrowed money, there seems to be a child who accidentally heard Nii-san asking Principal Relie (according to me) about what Sharis-senpai likes.

So, is Nii-san loved one Sharis-senpai?

Though she is from a family lineage of soldiers and tends to go out of control easily, she is a serious person who has a sense of justice.

She is a beautiful person and she also has a nice figure.

She is an acquaintance of Nii-san due to the first uproar, and they are also both in the "Knight Squadron", but — That can't be.

I quickly finished dinner and rushed to Sharis-senpai.

When heading to the first floor of the girl's dormitory, near the entrance, I saw the figures of Nii-san and Sharis-senpai.

When I hurriedly hold my breath and prick up my ears, I hear the two of them talking.

"Something Tillfarr likes? Let's see… If I remember correctly, that girl liked to collect accessories."

"Is that so? Thank you."

"I see, you can't also be underestimated, eh Lux-kun. I'm a little jealous. Please take care of my protegee."

Sharis-senpai laughed with a slightly complicated expression.

E-Eeeeeeeeeh!?

Enduring that which almost leaked out from my mouth, I saw the two part.

He pretends his loved one to be Sharis-senpai—, it is Tillfarr-senpai?

Since Tillfarr-senpai is Nii-san's classmate, they have many points of contact.

She has a candid character unlike a noble young lady's and she is a spirited cheerful person who can get close to anyone.

Though I think that it will not be strange even Nii-san comes to like her—

No way, does he intend to two-time? …That Nii.san?

While being confused, I'm walking a corridor with a red carpet with unsteady steps.

What to do. If I do not quickly confirm which is the real one—

"Ah, Airi, can I get a minute?"

"Eh—? N-Nii-san?"

Being suddenly called out by Nii-san from behind, I panicked.

"W-What exactly do you want…?"

While being slightly flustered, I pretend to be calm as usual.

"Um, it's about Nokuto, but— do you anything about what she likes?"

"—Eeeeeeh!?"

"What's wrong? Being so surprised."

"N-No… More importantly, why do you ask such a thing?"

"Ah, errr… I just want to ask, can't I?"

In a tone as to dodge the issue a little, Nii-san says so. It becomes more and more suspicious.

"It's fine. But is it for a present? I see that Nii-san really got good at handling a girl, too."

"D-Don't tease me. More importantly—"

While looking embarrassed, Nii-san heard about Nokuto's preferences from me.

After Nii-san left, I confirm the recent events while being driven by impatience.

He bought a present for Sharis-senpai, and had asked about Tillfarr-senpai and Nokuto's preferences.

Does he really intend to confess to the three girls of the Triad?

Such a thing is impossible, but—

Then, the holiday of the next day, my uneasiness became reality, and Nii-san bought two presents in the Fort City.

The bad presentiment swelled up rapidly.

『—It seems that Lux-senpai, the only male of the academy already has someone he likes.

Even if Nii-san confesses to the three girls and it becomes a three-timing, it will be bad; in the first place it will be also unpleasant if he confesses to even one of them.

After all, Nii-san does not belong to everyone, but my only—

"Ah, everyone. You came just at the right time—"

Nii-san, with the presents in hands, heads towards Sharis-senpai who is having lunch in the courtyard of the academy.

"S-Such a thing, absolutely not!"

I unintentionally shout and break in between them.

"A- Airi!? Why are you here—?"

"N-Nii-san, too, please stop it! Confessing to multiple women is immoral! Besides, about me too— huh?"

Then, I notice Tillfarr-senpai and Nokuto whom I did not see before as they were hidden by the tree.

It seemed like he was going to give the presents to the three girls all at once.

"…What is the meaning of this?"

"Errr. I just want to return the three of them the favor for when they had visited me last time."

After Nii-san answered so, the three girls of the Triad smiled wryly.

"Hahahaha. Sorry. It looks like your little sister has been worried needlessly."

"Wow, I didn't expect that you would take it seriously … How serious are you, Lux-cchi."

"Yes. I am glad for your feelings, but please do not force yourself too much."

It seems like the three girls have demanded a return gift as a joke due to the visit when Nii-san had fallen due to fatigue before.

Then, Nii-san was seriously troubled about returning a present…

"I am amazed by you, Nii-san… It's the usual thing though."

"No, I also understand well that kind of not common sense after all… But, I'm indebted to the three of them in a lot of ways—"

"If you do these kinds of things, you will be asked for a present by everyone in the academy one day, you know ?"

When I warn him like so, Sharis-senpai smiled wryly.

"It's your little sister says, Lux-kun. You're slightly too good-natured. —But well, if you say it's just for this time, I am very glad for the first time in a while. Thank you."

"Me too — thank you for the ribbon, Lux-cchi. You're really a serious Prince."

"Yes. Frankly speaking, I am also happy. Since practical articles such as handkerchiefs are to my liking."

After Tillfarr and Nokuto respectively also said with a smile,

"However, after having giving us good souvenirs, it's irritating that there is nothing we can give you in return, eh. Next time, the three of us will have a sleepover party, but — if you're fine with it, why don't you also come?"

"Eeeeeeeeeeh!? W-Wait, that'll be bad—"

"…Nii-san, right after saying that, can you honestly not accept their request now?"

I coldly retorted to Nii-san who was blushing in panic.

"Oh, half of it wasn't a joke, but — you shouldn't let your little sister worry too much. Well then, take care of us again in the "Knight Squadron", Lux-kun."

After parting from the three girls of the Triad, I gave a sermon to Nii-san.

That since his situation is very special, he should be careful not to get caught in strange rumors.

—Thus, my investigation this time came to a close.

While feeling a little relieved, I reconfirm Nii-san's unreliability and his good nature.

It looks like a periodical observation is still necessary.

Therefore, I should also write such a conclusion in this diary.

『As expected, Nii-san is useless without me.

References

1. ↑ There is no error on the translation here; it just means that because there were many people in the girl's dormitory, the idea of venturing there didn't occur to him. But if he had thought about Airi, he could have taken the risk to go by her and wait that the contest ended
2. ↑ Attack as in make a move on her
3. ↑ I think "child" here refers to her little sister Philphie; Relie thinks that the way to help her sister lies in the ruins investigation
4. ↑ like lover life, of course
5. ↑ daughter of high class family
6. ↑ I think here it refers to her flat chest, lol
7. ↑ Just done a literal translation, so it may be an idiom. And if so, then I guess it'd be "you were afraid to touch upon/face the problem"
8. ↑ means deducting the rules established since the Old Empire and which were advantageous for men as they couldn't operate Drag-Rides during a long period of time